THE WORLD'S FIFTY BEST SHORT NOVELS

[IN TEN VOLUMES]

GRANT OVERTON
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

VOLUME THREE

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
Shackled	*Achmed Medullah*	5
The Monster	*Stephen Morehouse Avery*	177

THE WORLD'S 50 BEST SHORT NOVELS

SHACKLED

By Achmed Abdullah

Wind sank away to the west with a swift surge as of innumerable small wings. Sunshine dropped to meet the rush of oncoming night; glowing on the snowy avalanche of el-Korma's white, flat-roofed houses with molten gold and copper; softening the fitful tangle of flowers and shrubs in Mustaffa Madani's neglected garden with pastel shades of lemon and orchid and rose and turquoise and elfin green; cutting deep, violet shadows into the bazaars that teemed and mazed beyond the garden walls, twisted and turned there like an industrious honeycomb with agile, slender, booth-lined alleys and cul-de-sacs; spreading hands of somnolence over all that greedy Arab life of barter and ruse and secretiveness and violence; hushing the street vendors' guttural cries to a note of minor, servile entreaty:

"Buy!"

"Buy, O Moslems!"

"Cheap here! Cheap!"

"O chick pease! O pips! To sharpen the teeth!"

"Dates! I sell dates! All sorts of dates! Dates from Al-Hilwah, large and flat and brown! Red

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Jabali dates tasting of summer! Green dates from the Khuzaryriyah!"

"Dates give fever in the month of pilgrimages! Figs! Buy figs, O Moslems!"

"Apples! Apples! Apples cause sickness to depart, and there is no sickness in them!"

"Buy. . . ."

"Give way, fathers of dogs!" The mob splashed sideways, like a puddle beneath booted foot, as an Arab dignitary, fat and leering and statuesque, astride a ridiculously small white donkey, moved through the bazaar, preceded by half a dozen stalwart black servants who were shouting insulting and defying words at everybody, and belabouring with democratic impartiality the backs and thighs of buyer and seller alike.

"O your right!" they yelled as they brought down their long, brass-tipped staves. "O your left! O your face! O your belly! O your foot!"—suiting the swing of their sticks to the part of Arab or Jew or negro anatomy which they were striking. "O your back, your back, your back! Give way, ignoble and unmentionable ones!"

They disappeared down a winding alley.

"Bah! Fatted ass!" A small boy thumbed his nose at the dignitary's retreating figure.

A small girl—she looked like a tiny, golden puffball—turned and raised her single garment expressively.

"The curve of my back to you!" she jeered. "The heel of my spine to your unclean father!"

And again merchants and customers moiling and coiling; here and there friend meeting friend, embracing, clasping like wrestlers, throwing loud,

smacking kisses into the air with the tips of their fingers; again the trade cries:

"Buy!"

"Buy here!"

"Sweet water—and gladden your soul! O lemonade—lemonade here!" with a rhythmic clanking of brass cups.

"Here is incense! It cures and protects!"

"Out of the way—" the pant of the water carrier, as he staggered beneath a green, bloated skin, fit burden for a buffalo—"and say: 'There is but One God!'"

"Perfumes from France and Persia! Ah—the deliciousness of heliotrope! Essence of pear—to play with the senses in the early night! Trade with me, O mother of a thousand charms—here—smell—half a drop on the back of your hand!"

"Rare drugs from the south—to strengthen your lover's manhood!"

"Onions! Onions!"

"Eat them yourself and sweeten your breath, Jew with the lousy beard!"—a desertman's loutish, uncalled-for insult, and the other's foul repartee:

"Father of a rotten smell! May pigs defile your mother's grave! Indeed it has been said that every morning you wash your face in a camel's water!"

"Ho, seller of pig's tripe!" the desertman's rage-choked shriek. "Ho, bath servant! Ho, brother of a naughty sister! Now—by the teeth of God—you shall eat stick!"

And the "stick eating," rather painful since the stick was a *nahbut,* an ashen stave six feet long and thick as a man's wrist; and a cry of anguish; a falsetto whimpering for mercy:

"In your protection, my lord! In your protection, O my Head, O my Eyes. . . ."

Laughter. Men taking sides. The beginning of a ful-fledged, riotous bazaar fight, when a white-turbaned priest intervened, a very old man, his drawn, crinkly skin the color of alabaster, his grey eyes filled with the kindness which comes with many years, his beard thinned to a straggling, grey tuft.

"Peace, Moslems!" his words. "Peace—in the name of Allah, the Holder of the Scales of Justice!"

"*Ullah hadiq*. . . ." a pious, slightly hypocritical murmur; and once more the merchants' wheedling invitations to buy:

"Here is watercress!"

"Two bunches for five centimes!"

"Eggplants! Eggplants!"

"Plums! Plums! Round as your breasts, O female pilgrim! Plums—here! Buy the sweet and taste the full!"

"Buy! Buy. . . ."

The cries overlapped, crossed, mingled in a shrewd, puling Semitic symphony. Everybody was anxious to finish the business of the day; for there was the Arab tradition that no street merchant, under penalty of the morrow's ill fortune, should take home with him unsold wares.

Sell, thus, even at a loss:

"Sixteen oranges! For only three centimes!"

"Seventeen! For two centimes, O daughter of the blacksmith! Give me one centime!"

The daughter of the blacksmith seemed to be in an ugly mood.

"Give? I? To you?" Her rich contralto bellied the thin gauze of her face veil. "And only yesterday

you sold me turnips that were as full of vermin as that unclean abomination, your turban. Give? I shall give you nothing except, belike, the flat of my hand against your lean buttocks, O noseless son of a Jew and a she-hyena!"

"Wah!" came the man's prompt and unchivalrous rejoinder. "I was wrong in trying to trade with you. You have not even the price of a single peanut's shell tied in the strings of your dirty drawers, O mother of sixteen dogs! Give even yourself, your lips and your breasts, for the smell of half an orange —and I would call the bargain ruinous—by Allah and by Allah!"

Laughter. The laughter of the Orient. Exaggerated, peaking to a gurgling, hysterical falsetto. Then, suddenly, dropping two octaves to a cavernous, guttural hiccough.

Again the minor, whining entreaty:

"Buy!"

"Buy here!"

"Ten centimes!"

"Cheap! I am losing money—may I be father to my sons!"

"Only your wife knows if you are!" This from the daughter of the blacksmith.

Across the street, the Mosque of the Five Swords reared its minaret of rosy stone overlaid half way up with a faience tiling of dusky, peacock green sheen. The muezzin's voice, chanting the *Maghrib,* the last prayer of the day, drifted out suddenly, stilling the tumult:

"Es salaat wah es salaam aleyk, yah auwal khulk Illah wah khatimat russul Illah—peace be with Thee and the glory, O first-born of the creatures of God

and seal of the apostles of God! Hie ye to devotion! Hie ye to salvation! Prayer is better than sleep! Prayer is better than food! Bless ye God and His Prophet! Come, all ye faithful!"

"Wah khatimat russul Illah—" mumbled the crowd, turning and bowing in the direction of Mecca, while some hurried to enter the mosque that was raised on a flight of broad steps, its magnificent horseshoe gateway covered with delicate Moorish arabesques in black and gold, its great architectural masses defining themselves with that firm simplicity of breadth and grandeur which is so typical of Islam's profound, monotheistic instinct.

* * * *

On the flat roof-top of his house Mustaffa Madani listened. He looked into the street, at the people, the Mosque of the Five Swords, the muezzin standing there sharply outlined in the rays of the dying sun.

Mustaffa Madani's face, narrow, high-nosed, was like a sardonic vignette. His mouth was thin and bitter.

"Wah khatimat russul Illah—" he echoed.

There was no faith in his voice, nor hope.

* * * *

He turned to the young girl who sat by his side.

"And why should I praise God?" he asked. "Why should I bless the Prophet, my ancestor? Ah—the burden of our ancient race is hard to bear, little daughter. . . ."

"Yes, Father," she replied, automatically, without interest, without conviction.

She was small and white skinned. Her eyes were intensely brown and curiously innocent. Only the

powerful molding of her chin and the curve of her long throat gave indication of slumbering passions. She was sweet with the sweetness of her sixteen years. But she was not yet complete; seemed more like a lovely sketch for the glorious promise of her maturity.

There was a tinge of ruddy gold in her hair, speaking of an admixture of Norse blood. And, indeed, tradition had it that many centuries earlier, when her family had ruled Spain as a Moslem province, one of her ancestors had tilted a lance in bloody tournament with the Christian Duke of Languedoc for the flower and glove and heart of the daughter of Roderic, the Gothic king of Granada—in the dead, medieval days when harshly conflicting faiths—paradoxically, or logically—taught tolerance; before a brittle, unbending orthodoxy of scientific atheism bred prejudices and racial hatreds; before a hackneyed, sterile, pseudo-rationalistic sciolism took the place of the Arc of the Covenant and a self-made anthropologist's sensationalism and print-clouted theorems were substituted for Leviticus and Pentateuch.

It was due to this tradition that she owed her name: Gouthia, the Gothic Princess.

"*Weled eth-thibi*—the son of the wolf, they called me once," her father went on. "And what am I today but a mock and a stench throughout Tunis, in the nostrils alike of Moslem and Christian and Jew? I—a Shareef, a descendant of the True Prophet—peace on Him and His family. . . ."

"Peace on Him!" Gouthia droned mechanically.

"Peace on Him and the blessings!" chimed in el-Fosiha, the only servant of the house, a wrinkled,

plum colored old negress from the Sahara, who squatted on her haunches between father and daughter, rocking from side to side like a chained jungle beast to ease the strain on her ankles, her naked, shriveled, pendant breasts jerking ludicrously to and fro, like empty sausage skins.

She coughed discreet warning and winked a red-rimmed, rheumy eye at Gouthia who was tapping her narrow feet on the broken, tessellated mosaic of the roof-top, her full lips opening to an incipient yawn.

"The burden of our ancient race is hard to bear—" repeated Mustaffa Madani.

Gouthia hardly listened.

She knew it all by heart.

* * * *

She looked out upon the streets of el-Korma, running their dim, tortuous ways; upon the faded Andalusian beauty of the Mosque of the Five Swords; upon the bazaar that more and more each year, as her father was forced to sell pieces of his ancestral property, encroached upon the weed-choked garden with shallow booths and shops and shadowy alcoves of bright, scented merchandise and the bee-hive buzzing of barter and trade.

She looked out upon all that motley North African world—color of romance, color of blood, color of pestilence—passing and repassing: Arabs, solemn, impassive, statuesque, a languor of light in their immobile gaze; Touregs from Timbuktoo with their sinister face veils, a glint and crackle of steel in their tightly girded waist shawls; bare-legged, vulpine Bedawins in folds of earth brown wool, swaggering with the beggar's insolence of their breed; negro women with children at the naked breast; thin-

featured, large-eyed, listless Tunisian dandies in delicate silk burnooses of pistache and heliotrope and old rose, jonquils stuck gallantly over their small ears, some ogling the unveiled women—Jewesses and Sicilians—and others shamelessly fondling the shoulders of painted, corrupt dancing-boys who tripped mincingly by their side; sheykhs of the faith, bearing over-great, green turbans that weighed more than their heads; ill-mannered, staring European and American tourists, sneering because they could not understand, laughing because, somehow, they felt embarrassed; full-breasted Djerba Jewesses covered with the crude, sand molded silver jewelry of the desert; Spanish colonists whose faces seemed in arms; ruddy-skinned Chaouias with the freedom of gait and the unblenching eyes of their roystering ilk; tawdry, furtive, nervous Greeks and Levantines; scant-bearded Riffians stalking along in all the dignity of pride and dirt; Moroccan Arabs with a hint of Goth and Vandal blood in blue eyes and honey yellow hair; a Catholic missionary bishop whose face was marred rather than helped by the relic of boisterous, vinous beauty that was in acrid, almost indecorous, altogether tragic contrast to his clerical garb, his shovel hat, and the great, pitiful crucifix on his breast. . . .

Passing. Repassing.

Talking. Gossiping. Laughing. Intensely, enormously alive.

* * * *

Just beyond the walls.

And so far away from her. . . .

* * * *

So far away. . . .

But she could sense the spell of the unknown sealed in that hectic, coiling life below—the spell of a new fate and new desires and new hopes calling her away from his ramshackle old house that seemed to teem with the grey ghosts of the dead centuries.

Ghosts of her father's bitter remembrance.

For Mustaffa Madani judged each phase of life, his own as well as others', by the pictures of the past in the back cells of his brain.

These pictures never weakened; never changed; never receded.

They were his eternal and quite futile protest against the world as he found it today; had to live it, live in it, today—with France, Europe, Christendom, driving the merciless chariot of her machine-made, steel-fashioned, brutally efficient civilization across a supine Arab world steeped in small gossip and footling feuds and sensuous fatalism; with his own breed, the Shareefian families, the direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed, the former rulers of this land, watching the chariot's crunching progress—watching it with stony eyes and bitter, tense souls—watching it helplessly, hopelessly—watching it wrapped in the dignity of a people at whose back twelve hundred years of unbroken racial pride, culture, and achievement were sitting in solemn, graven rows.

He was unable to reconcile himself to his day and generation.

"He wears a veil upon a veil," said his friend, Abubekr Sabri, the sheykh of the Molawee dervishes.

There, then, was the tragedy of his life. There,

too, the ironic, pantaloonish comedy, reminiscent of some cruel old Italian pantomime.

Not that he himself thought it either tragic or comic.

For, after all, we cannot ask an Arab to be astonished at the fact of being an Arab. We cannot expect a fact to be mystified by the fact of being a fact.

* * * *

Had you probed Mustaffa Madani's soul and brain with the lancets and scalpels and bone-scrapers of psychological vivisection, you would have found little there except the immemorial, unbending haughtiness which had been the strength, the causality, and the pivotal hinge of his forefathers' achievements as they swept out of the yellow Arabian waste to bring half the western world under the spurred heel of Islam; and which today, still unbending, brittle, contentious, but opposed by a modern, superior, and more ruthless strength, had become the weakness of their latter-day descendants.

The anarchic principles of individualistic Islamic life—what could they do against the principles, also anarchic, but dovetailing and organized, of western aggression?

The four-square, wire-drawn, algebraic Islamic faith that needed neither intellectual nor miraculous subsidy, that dispensed with spiritual middlemen between God and man's soul—what could it do against an up-to-date and intolerant Christian paganism, bred—curiously—by revivalism and transcendentalism *plus* business sense?

The harmony of superb Moslem singleness—what

could it do against the cacophony of modern mental erosion?

The mood of the Psalms—what could it do against the mood of jazz?

Incapable of adjusting himself to new conditions and new ethics, Mustaffa Madani could not understand this present era in which gold and yard-stick and mendacious publicity had superseded his own more picturesque if less practical scaling of life's values.

There was not in his desert-bred heart the hardy, provident wit to put his head and his hands to lawful enterprise. Nor could repeated, painful experiences convince him that a pure lineage was of less account in the modern world than a knowledge of arithmetic and the simple business preliminaries of European colonial finance which said that two and two make five if you are the seller, three if you are the buyer.

To the glorious, centrifugal stupidity of his mind, the idea that anybody not a Shareef, be he Jew or Christian or fellow-Moslem, could ever be his equal, or even pass for a gentleman, was not only fantastic and fabulously grotesque, but appeared as something basically immoral, striking at the very elementals of his ethical faith—more so than it would have to his ancestors of thirty generations ago, since the latter, busy with founding the facts for their claims of superiority, had not the time to think out the reasons nor to codify them.

His pride was exactly like an eagle, narrowing its circles, always on the verge of swooping down.

But there was never anything there to swoop down to; nothing there to carry off and devour.

* * * *

Five years earlier, the French governor-general, anxious to have the good-will and loyal support of the leading Arab clans, had called on him in state to offer him—a sheer matter of administrative, colonial courtesy, hardly important enough to be labeled as administrative, colonial bribery—a high French decoration.

Mustaffa Madani had raised his eyebrows. He had sent back the captain of Spahis who was the governor-general's aide-de-camp with the shattering message that he was not at home to His Excellency, nor ever would be.

Pressed for reasons, he had replied:

"How can I receive him, captain? Why—I am a Shareef. And he . . . ?"

"He is the governor-general!"

"Yes, yes. But . . ."

"But . . . ?"

"*Mah li-hoom asl*—his people are not of the lineage."

* * * *

The lineage!

Consider.

And be it mentioned in parenthesis that the governor-general, Count Odon-Marie de Lubersac-Crespigny, traced his paternal descent to the Merovingian kings while a legendary and picaresque maternal ancestry connected him with Mélusine, the water fairy.

Be it mentioned, too, that he was a typical French bureaucrat, meticulous, unimaginative, harsh and exact with a Latin's buskined, buckram-lined ratiocination.

Be it mentioned, furthermore, that Mustaffa

Madani's naif arrogance—which an English governor-general would have dismissed with a laugh and something akin to sympathetic admiration—did not help him with the French colonial authorities and that on several subsequent occasions, when he was engaged in litigations over mortgaged property with native or European usurers, judgment was given against him, and that his taxes were raised, impoverishing him more and more.

Still—he shrugged his shoulders, spread eloquent hands—these people were not of the lineage.

Nothing else mattered, though today, in the evening of his life, he was stripped of all his possessions except a miserable patch of olive trees on the outskirts of town whose yearly crop was not worth the price of a cotton turban, and this ramshackle palace with its dwindling, weed-choked garden . . . nothing remained of it except, stronger than neglect, stronger than the bleak hand of poverty, a tremendous parterre of roses, creepers as well as bushes, scrambling and growing in their own strong-willed fashion, clothing stones with hearts of deep ruby, building arches of glowing pink and tea yellow against the tight, pigeon-blue sky, lifting shy, single, dewy heads in hushed corners.

Terribly tragic, the palace itself.

Years had passed since the façade had been whitewashed, and now it had taken on a golden tint, like an ancient Spanish cathedral. There was hardly a suspicion left of the arabesques and geometric designs that crusted the marble frames of the windows. The outer gate, once inlaid with bits of jade and coral and chrysoprase, showed holes where the jewels had been picked out—and sold.

Inside, a wilderness of vaulted, echoing spaces; a maze of stairs and corridors; literally, hundreds of rooms, with ceilings of stucco and gilt, with walls of fretted, pink marble; balconies which clung like birds' nests to the sheer sides of the house; doors of ebony and teak and bronze—and everything dusty and empty.

Not much dignity. Dignity of poverty.

Just age; and decadence; and—yes—dirt.

* * * *

Only one servant of the hundred-hundred servants. El-Fosiha, the wrinkled old negress who had not left him because of the love in her heart and the pity in her soul.

* * * *

It was with food in that drab, pathetic household as it was with clothes. Poor, both; scanty; for himself, his daughter, and the servant.

And it needed many trips to the other end of el-Korma where, in his shop in the Bazaar of the Moroccan Jews, Abraham Maimonides would salaam deeply and hide an ironic smile and offer a pittance for whatever Mustaffa Madani came to sell: a rug, a strip of garden land, a husty old dagger, a carved Cairene stool, a bit of silver jewelry that once had graced the throat of a great Shareefian lady.

Then both Jew and Arab would bargain, each after the manner of his kind.

The latter would use the weapon of the weaker party and damn the Jew's family root and branch for three generations; and the other, being the stronger, would take it all with salaams and smiles, consoling himself with the profit which he was going

to reap, and giving to Mustaffa Madani a tithe of what the article was worth.

"Rebecca-my-star," Abraham Maimonides would say to his plump, good-looking wife after each visit, "that Moslem is a face of misfortune. Me he cursed and you and the children and the unborn children in your womb—may there be many—and my parents —may they reach paradise!"

"What do you care? Every sheep is suspended by its own heels!"

"True enough, Rebecca-my-gold! And the profits on the sheep are mine. Hayah-hayah . . . he is like an ebony tree back home in Morocco—that Moslem! He cannot bend. But he is brittle for all his brave airs and hollow inside—and one day a storm will come and break him to pieces . . ."

"What of it?"

"Nothing! I'll buy the pieces!"

* * * *

Thus Abraham Maimonides' judgment.

Thus, too, the judgment of the other towns-people, Jews and Arabs and native Christians.

Slightly amused they were and decidedly irreverent, though they salaamed deeply and spoke courtly, gliding words whenever Mustaffa Madani passed.

It is a moot point why, sneering at him, ridiculing him, aware of his poverty and impotence, they salaamed. Perhaps because, atavistically, these descendants of people whom Mustaffa Madani's ancestors had ruled with an iron fist, still feared the empty symbol after its meaning had vanished; perhaps because, deep down, it is snobbism which rules the human heart, because, subconsciously, they were ashamed of it—and tried to apologize to themselves

with a parallel power of satirizing that which was more compelling than their logic and knowledge of facts.

He noticed it. He understood. He knew what they thought.

At times he complained of it to his daughter and his servant; but never to himself.

For, in reality, he did not care.

His pride was such that it did not need the applause of others. Such applause might even have appeared to him as arrogance.

Medieval he was in his conviction that a man's income or official position or even learning and civic worth and greatness of character could never be a touchstone of merit. There was his blood; always his blood; and he guarded it as carefully as he guarded his last remaining thoroughbred and Gouthia, his daughter.

Pride waxed fat upon his poverty; and poverty shrank lean upon his pride.

* * * *

He spoke often to Gouthia of the past, wishing, though he loved her dearly, that she had been a son so as to understand him better.

There was in his telling the tang and zest and clank of the old days; days in the south, in the desert, when the men of his tribe, the Benni Iddrissi, now scattered to the four winds of the Mediterranean Littoral, would sweep out of the sand waste mounted upon dromedaries, over a thousand of them, nodding in their lofty, peaked saddles to the deep gait of their animals, with a cold glisten of iron and the black song of war, bent upon foray or raid; or perhaps bent on desert sports, the fantasia, the

lab-el-baroda, the powder play of the nomads in honor of a visiting sheykh.

He would describe at length, relishing each word, each memory, how they charged, in couples, by tens, by hundreds, one by one, forwards and backwards, firing and yelling without cessation, on every side horses and camels prancing, weapons glittering in the sun, burnooses floating in the breeze, of all colors, red and purple and orange and yellow and black and pink and white, mingling into a rainbow for the space of a moment, then dissolving to form fresh, audacious harmonies as the desertmen galloped in ever new combinations.

He would describe—and grow young in the telling—how they would dart by like winged phantoms, old and young, men of colossal proportions, strange and terrible figures erect in their square silver stirrups, with heads thrown back, hair streaming loose in the wind and muskets held aloft, and small, beardless youngsters perched like monkeys on their high saddles; and each, as he discharged his rifle into the air or leveled his black, tufted bamboo lance, giving his savage war cry:

"Here am I! I!"

"Oh, my mother!"

"In the name of Allah!"

"To my horse!"

"To my honor!"

"To my beloved!"

"Wah!"—typically Arab—"to myself!";

and racing up and down, bending and twisting from their saddles, loosing their turbans and throwing them on the ground, turning in full career and pick-

ing them up with the point of lance or sabre or musket.

* * * *

He spoke of it again tonight.

Spoke bitterly of the change that had come over the land; that had come over him:

"A mock I am throughout Tunis—and old, old. . . ."

"No, no, master!" exclaimed el-Fosiha.

"Yes. I know. Old. Impotent. Not even your shriveled, black old breasts would bloat to the touch of my lips!" He sighed; touched his closely cropped beard. "Look! Death sends his challenge in a grey hair. . . ."

* * * *

Gouthia hardly listened.

She loved her father. Her loyalty to him was of that unflinching, flinty quality that generations of her race had rendered to the men of her clan.

Her father could do no wrong. To her he was perfect, the kindest, bravest, cleverest man on earth; and if the world did not give to him the homage which was his due, then the world was to be despised and pitied.

But she was young, so pitifully young; and the past days of her father's remembrance were old and dead and buried; and at times she felt lonely; and out there beyond the garden walls was life, new life, keen life, waiting for the coming of her feet, the lifting of her veil.

* * * *

Had she been a young western girl, American or English, she would have known how to explain it, at least vaguely, in her own secret thoughts;

would have told herself that she wished to live her own life, to express herself to herself, to carry the strength of her own instead of other people's convictions and reactions. Perhaps she would not have been exactly sure how; would only have know that whatever it was, even though she did not clearly realize hidden cause and eventual effect, she wanted to experience—something. Not necessarily love; the freeing touch and swing of sex. Still—again—something; something to do, rather something to be—alone, herself, without questions from anybody thanks or replies to anybody, consideration for anybody.

But being an Oriental girl, an Arab, a Moslema sheltered by the veil of Islam—and the matter of the veil, slight in the telling, is enormous in the feeling—she only knew that this veil was all about her, like a sodden, stifling blanket, that it weighed upon her life, her heart, her brain and body, that beyond it pitiless, medieval gauze fabric dim souls, dim lives dim facts and fancies flitted, whispering to her in gliding undertones, calling to her as across an abyss

She was afraid of this outside world, beyond the veil, beyond the garden walls. Yet she desired it with all her young blood; felt, as she desired, the curious premonition of a conflict between a crisis of her senses and a crisis of her own conscience. Illy explained, turgid and viscous, formless, mysterious as it was to her brain, it yet lay on her consciousness, reacted on her subconsciousness, as something tremendously worthwhile and important and dangerous and fascinating that filled her with a kind of puzzled, dread wonder and longing and hope. She felt—felt continuously, enervatingly—as she had at that mo-

ment, four years earlier, when puberty had come to her, suddenly, rather cruelly as it does to children of the Orient, with a sensation part caress and part itch, part longing and part shame, part brutality and part listless surrender.

She was luckier than the average English or American girl of her age in so far as she was not top-heavy with knowledge, nor with the intellect's uneasy, nervous groping after knowledge, truth, and abstract thought. Unconsciously, she agreed to the Moslem dictum that intellect as such produces more errors than verities; that truth, be it engendered by knowledge and research or engendered by self, is seldom susceptible of embodiment and, when embodied, often more hurtful than helpful; that thought, the thesis, is less enduring and important than substance, the fact.

Character—had she been able to reason it out—was to her not a degree of truth, but a degree of life—and life was both more subtle and more stark than a single chilly truth.

* * * *

Her father talked on. She did not reply.

Night came, trailing a purple cloak.

She looked into the distance with starry eyes. A desert wind sprang up, and on its wings a young voice drifted, singing a throaty, falsetto Tunisian love song:

"Ouh ghramhoom fi hshaya dairni mqam
Andi shahoodoo tadri
Djish elghram. . . ."

The voice faded into the night. There came a void of silence.

She sighed.

She knew about love, the physical side of it. She knew the gestures and effects of sex relations, vicariously, it is true, but down to their last, twisting ramifications. Her knowledge might have surprised many a western man of the world, would have shocked most. For she was an Oriental. Thus she saw neither shame in it, nor mystery.

She only saw mystery in the fact that the singer, whoever he was, was singing to somebody, Arab girl or negress or Jewess, but not to her—not to her . . . and she felt in her soul a pain that was somehow sweet.

"We are all in the guardianship of God," she mumbled.

Mustaffa Madani looked up.

"What, daughter?"

"Oh—nothing. I am tired. I am going to bed."

She rose.

"Sweet dreams, daughter."

He held out his arms. She kissed him. She crossed the roof-top; stopped; turned at the head of the stairs:

"Are you coming, nurse?"

"Presently. I have to talk to your father."

"About what?"

"Oh—things of the house."

"Good night, nurse!"

"Good night, young soul of my old soul!"

* * * *

Gouthia left.

El-Fosiha waited until the echo of her footsteps had completely disappeared. Then she moved close to Mustaffa Madani, squatting before him, touching his knee with a withered, gnome-like hand.

He looked down at her, smiling half-ironically as if he knew what she was going to say; knew, too, the uselessness of it.

He was quite motionless, except for one foot. He had thrown his right leg across his left, and the right foot, bare, with its gleaming, arched instep, trembled so violently that the light, yellow leather slipper which hung from the big toe swung to both sides like the pendulum of a clock.

"Things of the house you wish to speak to me about, eh?" he asked.

"Yes."

"No more rice in the bin, I suppose? No more salt, no more sugar? Must I go to the Jew tomorrow and sell him my hide for the price of old leather? Allah! Life to the poor is a paradise in which hogs feed!"

"No, no . . ."

She shook her head. Their relations were the typical relations between master and servant in the Orient, a strange mingling of utter servility and utter, brutal, democratic frankness, the whole spiced with the picturesque abuse of Islam.

"It is not that," she went on. "There is never enough rice, never enough salt and sugar, and there is always the Jew—cursed be that malodorous goat, his father! Never enough food! My belly knows—" she slapped her naked, shriveled stomach—"and yours! All Tunis knows! Why should I speak of it?"

"What then?"

"It is tonight," she went on passionlessly, "that you are a very great fool, Heaven-Born."

"Better a fool than a toothless old black she-ape!" came his reply, equally passionless.

"Better a toothless old black she-ape," she completed the pleasant round of Oriental metaphors, "who has no soul and thus cannot be held responsible for sins, than a fool—with a soul—and a wicked soul, a selfish, putrid, filthy, dung-spotted soul—such as . . ."

"Such as . . . ?"

"Such as you have, O my master! *Wah!*" She spat out the exclamation, pointing at him with an eloquent and inexorable thumb. "You are as wrong and wicked as Musboot, the Devil, the unclean Lord of lies and fleas!"

"Am I, indeed?" He was sardonically amused.

"Yes, by the Prophet!"

"Close your mouth lest your teeth catch cold, O Quite Useless!" he laughed, not at all offended.

Then, after a pause, he continued, more seriously:

"And you mean what, exactly?"

"That you were right before!"

"When, old woman?"

"There are indeed grey hairs in your beard—the messengers of death."

"What of it?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Death has his rope around the heels of all of us and at the appointed time he pulls. Death is a blind camel that comes out of the dark without warning or jingling of bells. Who can escape what is written on the forehead?"

"Nobody can," agreed the negress.

"Well—there you are! Why speak of it?"

"But after your death, what of Gouthia, your daughter, your only child, your only kin? She will be quite alone in the world. Before this I spoke to you about . . ."

"I know!" he interrupted impatiently. "Marriage, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why will barren old spinsters and old women past the age of temptation always blab about marriage?"

"Barren old spinster? I?" she screeched angrily, flicked on the raw. "Did you not come to my bed —once—years ago—and . . . ?"

"I was fifteen years old, and with ardent, warm intestines. Youth will kiss a goat!"

Silence.

"Listen, Heaven-Born—" she began again.

"No, no, no!"

"She is sixteen, Heaven-Born! She is in the flower of her youth, her beauty, her desires. Her heart clamors for the touch of love. Clamors her body."

"You—how do you know—?" he demanded with quick, ugly suspicion.

"How can I help knowing?"

"Did she say so?" he insisted.

"No!"

"Then—how . . . ?" He smiled; felt relieved.

"I know just the same! Am I not a woman? And, being a woman, can I not feel another woman's secret longings?"

"You—a woman?" he exclaimed contemptuously.

"What else? Old—yes—and toothless and wizen! But, even before you came to my bed, I knew about love. Once I, too, was desired and kissed in the black tents . . ."

"Aye!" came his hooting laughter. "In the black

nights! The light of a single star would have doomed you!"

"*Aughrr!*" she hissed like a wild-cat; then swallowed her rage. "Listen . . ."

"But . . ."

"No!"

"Be silent, mother of two left feet—and bring me my pipe!"

"I will not be silent—and I will not bring you your pipe—no—by the crimson pig's bristles!" Her voice leaped up shrilly. "You have no heart, no pity, no understanding, O creature! I tell you—Gouthia must marry. . . ."

"Must? Yes. Must. But whom? Who shall be the father of her sons, of my grandsons? There is not her equal in blood in el-Korma nor in all the countryside. She is a Shareef. She is of the lineage. And you—you ask me to . . . Fool!" He was rapidly losing his temper; rose; faced el-Fosiha with wooden, stabbing gestures. "Would you wish me to mate my blood with the unclean spawn of the bazaar gutters—with Jews, belike, or negroes—or pig-eating Christian infidels who divide their God by three and five?"

"There are still Arabs in Tunis."

"They are not of the lineage!"

His face, the white moon rays cutting across it as clean as with a knife, looked dark and tense and medieval, as if carved out of some old waxed, close-grained wood; almost Gothic; Gothic, too, the expression, half impassive and half exalted, the face of a pitiless leader or a pitiless dreamer.

"Not of the lineage!" he repeated; and, in the words, he seemed to be tasting the delight of some amazing and mysterious sensation.

The old negress stood her ground, firmly, bravely.

"Lineage!" she sneered. "Can you eat your lineage? Can you sell it? Can you drink it? Blood of the Prophet, are you? Cousin-in-blood to a stinking dung-heap—that is what you are. . . ."

"Allah!" he cut raucously through her abuse. "You old black bitch! Curse you all the angels! Curse you all the Moslems! Let all the heathens curse you!" His face grew livid with rage. His right hand closed about the short, knotted whip that hung from his waist shawl. "I shall flay the black hide off your back, you . . ."

Quite suddenly, he regained his temper. He smiled very gently.

"Never mind, O my mother," he went on. "We have grown old together and poor. Come, faithful old slave. Do not break your heart nor mine because of empty, tinkly words—because of the cruel sport of it. . . ."

But still she argued until at last she understood that there was no persuading him.

He stood there, motionless, serene.

Might as well plead with some haughty, sardonic, deaf immensity, without nerves, without heart, she said to herself.

Then another idea came to her.

She spoke it:

"And what will Gouthia live on after your death?"

He did not reply.

But he looked up. He seemed amazed, as if he had never thought of it before or perhaps, fearing the unformed thought subconsciously, had refused to crystallize it in his brain.

She felt it. And, woman-like, she drove home her point without mercy.

"The house is mortgaged to the roof," she said. "The Jew has a lien on the bricks—aye—and on the rats in the cellar, the vermin in the walls, the snakes in the garden. What else is there? A horse with foundered fetlocks . . ."

"A thoroughbred!" he interrupted, his greater grievance disappearing momentarily in the lesser. "The horse is a thoroughbred!"

"Yes—but with foundered fetlocks in spite of its blood—like yourself! What else is there? A mangy *slooghy* hound—three cats—seven chickens—a mass of rotten old furniture—and myself! And what else? Hey? What else? Nothing, Heaven-Born! Nothing at all! And how is Gouthia going to live? How is she going to buy food and drink? Tell me! Tell me!" Her voice rose a hectic octave. "How? How? How? I shall tell you how, O great fool!"

And, cruelly, each word flicking across the man's soul like the sting of a whip:

"There is but one path. You know—before this women of the Shareefs have trod that path because of their fathers unhuman pride. . . ."

"Be silent!" he roared.

"It is the truth! It hurts, Heaven-Born, eh?" she went on, triumphantly. "Too proud to mix your seed with the seed of decent people—because they be not of the lineage! But not too proud to let the seed of a hundred foul, lust-spotted strangers enter your daughter's blood—for the sake of a couple of silver douros—for the sake of food and drink—for the sake of despair! *Wah!* You have been in the city of Tunis in your youth. You have visited—doubtless,

for you are a man—the houses in the street of Sidi-ben-Naim. . . ."

"Be silent!" he commanded again, with a cry like a hurt animal's.

Then his voice sank to a moaning, broken whisper: "Allah—Allah . . ."

He sat down. He felt an immense lassitude in every limb.

* * * *

The street of Sidi-ben-Naim.

The odor of death. The odor of decay. The odor of sweat. The odor of lust.

Yes. He knew it. . . .

* * * *

He remembered the women there, with their unveiled faces and their shameless manners: Tunisians with loose, balloon-like trousers in light colors and embroidered *djebbas;* desert Bedawins of the Ouled Nayil tribe covered with barbarous, sand molded silver jewelry and robed in siken *meleh'fahs;* negresses from beyond Timbuktoo with flat, tattooed noses and foreheads, and immense copper or ivory discs inserted in their lower lips; Moroccan Jewesses, huge, quivering, dead-white mountains of flesh, desired by either very old or very young men; a sprinkling of European women, French and English and Spanish and Italian; and, occasionally, a girl of the Shareefs, of the Prophet's blood and seed.

Walking up and down. Or sitting on narrow benches in front of their houses,, with their hands on their knees. Waiting for the buyers like cattle at a fair.

Grandmothers, more than a few. Even great-grandmothers. Mothers, many; with their little

daughters sitting on the same bench with them, already familiar with men's passions.

None too old. None too young.

Behind them, the brutish, yellow flare of petrol lights showing huddled, rickety stairs; showing rooms with narrow beds and, always, a great French mirror wardrobe.

There were no doors. Doors were not needed. These houses were always open.

Just curtains. And the noises behind the curtains.

Scents; lascivious; coiling; strong as the beat of a drum.

The street of Sidi-ben-Naim.

The odor of shame . . .

* * * *

He remembered one woman there in particular.

She had passed him one night with the cling-clong of her silver anklets and the stiff rustle of her brilliantly striped *foutah*.

He had followed her; had spoken to her. He had wondered at her pure Arabic, her exquisite manners, her grey, frank eyes, her tiny, henna-stained hands.

Then, in her tawdry room, with the silly Swiss clock and the gilt chair and the immense French mirror wardrobe, she had told him, after her seventh hasheesh pipe, of her home; of her father.

Vague tales, yet true tales, he had felt instinctively. East of Marakesh she had lived, near the Demnat caravan trail, and her father had been a powerful chief over the tribes of Flitta and Mentarba and Sqemra and Izzein. Then the French had invaded and conquered the country, and her father had been irreconcilable to foreign, Christian rule. Proud

he had been with the bitter, self-hurting pride of his Shareefian race.

And here, in the street of Sidi-ben-Naim, had been his daughter, his only child.

* * * *

Mustaffa Madani remembered her name: Zeina.

He remembered her sitting cross-legged on the divan, with staring eyes, half impudent and half pathetic, sipping thick, musk flavored coffee drop by drop, and eating large, mauve colored radishes.

He remembered how, after her eleventh hasheesh pipe, she had cursed her father's memory, with strange curses learned doubtless from some passing dervish:

"Cursed be his bones, his pride, his soul, his blood! By the face of Abraham! By the light of the Prophet! By the war cry of Mohammed! By the secret of Abdul Khadr Ghilani! By the horns of the Archangel Ishrafeel—cursed be he, my father! By the symbolism of Kamber! By the altar and the pulpit! By the flame and the mace and the sword! By the breath of the three, the five, the seven, and the forty-seven True Saints—cursed be he, my father!"

Mustaffa Madani shuddered at the recollection:

"Cursed be he, my father!"

The words repeated themselves in his thoughts.

They expanded and multiplied.

They were in his veins. They were in his bones. They were in the roots of his hair.

They seemed to fill every nook and cranny of his brain:

"Cursed be he, my father!"

He looked up. He shivered as if an ague. A deep-throated sob shook his massive frame.

He rose and crossed the roof-top, walking with a heavy step. It was dark now; and he stumbled. He bumped against a frail Cairene chair and kicked it furiously, swearing under his breath. The chair fell, breaking its back with a dull thud. The sound awakened the rage of destruction in his breast. He lifted his heavy-thewed arms, clenched his fists and brought them down with all their primitive, hacking strength, on a taboret covered with coffee cups and glasses.

Crash—crash—crash . . .

The noise of the splintering, bursting glass and porcelain cracked through the stillness of the night with the steely viciousness of an automatic pistol.

Blood squirted from his fingers. Blood stained his robe. But he did not notice it. Again he raised his fists, to complete the work of destruction, when his daughter's voice came from her room, directly beneath the roof-top, drifting up the stairs.

"What—what is the matter?" she asked sleepily, a little crossly.

He controlled himself.

"Nothing, nothing. I upset the taboret. Go back to sleep, Gouthia. Sweet dreams!"

He walked to the stairs; called down softly:

"Do you love me, small thing?"

"With all my heart, father!"

"May the Lord God bless you! May the All-Merciful not let you see the evil!"

He waited, head on one side, silent, for several minutes, until he could hear once more her regular breathing.

Then he walked away from the head of the stairs. He was a little less nervous. He said to himself

that he had been frightened by phantoms, just silly, unreal phantoms.

Why—he loved his daughter; loved her with all the tenderness—a harsh tenderness at times—with which he had loved her mother, dead these many years.

He would let no harm come to her. Dearer she was to him than his life. His life. And, with the word, with the thought, came a second thought, hard, logical, inexorable. His life. Yes. But after his life—what? Perhaps el-Fosiha was right. For how was Gouthia going to live?

He loved her. True. But would his love be buckler and lance and scimitar to her after he had died? Would his love protect her against the sendings of Fate, the black camel rider?

Once more he seemed to hear the other girl's voice echoing to his remembrance:

"Cursed be he, my father!"

One of those pitilessly just curses, he said to himself, that close one life, resume another.

* * * *

Formerly he had always possessed the faculty of forgetting whatever had embarrassed or humiliated him. It was as though his memory, like a strong, healthy stomach, rejected such nourishment before assimilating it or letting it poison his system.

But he could not today.

That girl—in the street of Sidi-ben-Naim . . . his own daughter. . . .

It was like a foreboding; a premonition.

Nothing supernatural about it; nothing queer; nothing even prophetic in the accepted sense.

For a foreboding is, after all, not a seeing into

the future but a seeing into the past when, intentionally or unintentionally, one did or left undone a certain deed, spoke or left unspoken a certain word, living on without giving a thought to it. Yet, in some secret place of its own, this deed, done or left undone, this word, spoken or left unspoken, carries on its existence, its reactions, its eventual consequences doubly powerful and vital because scotched; it leaves traces on the subconscious mind though the conscious has forgotten it until, little by little or suddenly, the subconscious bores through the conscious, pops to the surface, cracking it with broad fissures and subtle holes. And at that moment —like a sick man who becomes aware of a tumor that has been forming in his brain or his intestines—one feels all at once uneasiness, anxiety, nervousness, a certain regret, perhaps a certain fear—because the events resulting from the forgotten deed, done or left undone, the forgotten word, spoken or left unspoken, are on the verge of fulfillment while already the infallible instinct has drawn the consequences without registering the evolution or even the plausibility.

Foreboding. A joint development of facts of the past and gropings, imaginings into the future.

The girl of the street of Sidi-ben-Naim. There was the fact. His own daughter. There was the groping, the imagining—an imagining doubly painful since Mustaffa Madani was the sort of father to whom the thought of a man near his daughter provoked real physical jealousy.

Very suddenly he made up his mind.

He turned to the negress.

She had squatted down, a shapeless, black mass

beneath the black vaulting of the night, only her rolling eyeballs giving a flash of white.

"Bring me my woolen burnoose," he said composedly.

"You are going out?"

"Yes."

She jumped up.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To ask advice."

"About . . . ?"

"Gouthia." He smiled gently. "I love you well, faithful old slave."

He bent and kissed her black, wrinkled face.

She salaamed deeply.

"On you the salute, O my master! I did not mean to drive the iron into your soul when I spoke. . . ."

"Your words were just and true," he interrupted.

"Then—then you have changed your mind—you are going to seek a husband for . . ."

"No!"

"No?"

"There is none of the lineage in el-Korma. I shall not sully the blood of my race. But I shall look for another path out of the mire. I am going to consult the sheykh Abubekr Sabri."

"A wise man, Heaven-Born. But—" she continued stubbornly—"marriage would yet be wiser. It is because of marriage that Allah gave strength to the man and soft breasts to the woman."

"And it is because of blabbing that Allah gave to old women loose lips and leaky tongues," he rejoined with a return to his old good-humor. "There will be another path out of the mire. I shall see the sheykh. Give me my burnoose. It is late."

"But . . ."

"My burnoose!" His voice rose slightly.

"Listen is obey, O my master."

* * * *

She brought the burnoose. He threw it across his shoulders, left the house, and stepped out into the night, while el-Fosiha went to the bedroom which she shared with Gouthia.

She looked at the sleeping girl; and prayers came to her lips:

"By the night when she spreadeth her veil! By the day when it is manifested! By what made the male and the female, I beseech Thee, O Allah, protect Thou this girl! Praise be to Thee, the Lord of the Seven Worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful! Thee I worship, and Thee I ask for help! Thou art God the Eternal! I beseech Thee—protect Thou this girl, the apple of my eye!"

Gouthia stirred in her sleep.

She opened her eyes, saw the old negress standing above her, smiled, and was about to drop back to sleep again when, as earlier during the evening, a throaty, falsetto love song brushed through the purple stillness of the night and quivered up to the stars' gold:

"Beshooi, beshooi, yah hoebbi!
Hammah ennass issemoo bina!
Al esstook enndaff. . . ."

* * * *

Gouthia sat up.

"El-Fosiha!" she whispered.

"Yes—?"

"You have been young—?"

"Assuredly."

"You have loved—and been loved?"

"Indeed, child!" A melancholy smile spread over the wrinkled, black face; endowed it, strangely, with a fleeting suggestion of beauty.

"Tell me about it—" said Gouthia—"tell me. . . ."

"I have told you often, child."

"Tell me again."

"But—it is late. . . ."

"Please, please!"

"I shall tell you tomorrow."

"No. Tonight. Now. Please, please, please. . . ."

El-Fosiha sighed. She sat down on the edge of the bed, and took the girl into her arms.

"Listen, soul of my soul!" she began. "It was before I left the south, the Sahara, before I embraced Islam—when I still worshiped wooden idols and the blood spilled in Voodoo—when I was still a heathen—cursed be all unbelievers! Black he was and young and very tall and as handsome as the moon on the fourteenth day. He was of the tribe of the Ashantis, strong and a warrior, a crusher of stones, a killer of lions, a twirler of steel. And around his head—for he was a chief's son—he wore a circlet of great ostrich feathers. *Hayah*—how the feathers rushed and rushed, like trees in the meeting of winds, when he bent over and kissed me . . . *hayah, hayah!*—when he kissed me—with his youth and his strength and the red, red passion of his lips. . . ."

And she rambled on while Gouthia listened with dreamy, starry eyes.

* * * *

In the meantime Mustaffa Madani, who had rapidly crossed el-Korma, was plunging into a net-

work of narrow streets where the poor and unwashed of all Africa's motley races seemed to dwell together in amity and evil odors.

They were mostly negroes. Blacks of all blacks. Of a dozen different races, like a tribal chart from the Great Lakes to the miasma of the Bight of Benin, yet the majority were flat-noses and splay-lips of the West Coast—Argungus, Awoonahs, Jakris, Yorubas, and Aquamoos. For once, during the rule of the Beys of Tunis and before the French had annexed the land, el-Korma had been one of the main African slave marts, and the freed descendants, converted to a semblance of Islam and boasting Moslem names, continued to live and breed here.

But there was also a sprinkling of white men, Arabs and Europeans and Jews, men who had gone down the ladder of racial dishonor and civic disgrace until they had taken the final, irrevocable, unforgivable step: had gone *fantee;* had become black in speech and gesture and superstition and mating and vice and smell and mode of thought; had crossed beyond the pale—outcasts forever to their kith and kin.

In spite of the late hour the African quarter, which never ceases chattering and bickering, was still up and about. From open air kitchens the sound of frying escaped and the reek of sizzling fat, with the men squatting on their haunches, chewing and smoking and spitting and laughing. The women were mostly upbraiding their husbands and their offspring in high, shrill voices, while children of all ages and all degrees of nudity played and screamed about the filthy streets.

Puddles everywhere. Festering heaps of refuse, offal, excreta of humans and animals.

There were no doors. At least no doors that closed. Doors here had no official function.

For life was all in the open, shameless, untrammeled, savagely free.

And over it all a heavy scent, a mingling of sweat and musk, acrid, stagnant.

* * * *

Mustaffa Madani cut straight through the crowd, as a knife cuts through cheese.

He shuddered slightly; thought of el-Fosiha's warning as he passed a dive in front of which, their heads crowned with flowers, their slim bodies clothed in loose blouses of purple silk and baggy, red trousers, sat three young half-breed girls—for sale fully as much as were the bunches of bananas and the fiery-colored vegetables in the booth next door.

* * * *

A glimpse of another house. A cracked window. A brutish flare of light. A room on the level with the street. One man in there. Two women. One of the women was Arab, the other European. The man was an enormous, plum-colored, swag-bellied Saharan negro. Half his face was eaten away by a grey, filmy, leprous growth.

He was roaring a song with the full power of his lungs, an arm around each woman:

"If you want breasts,
White breasts,
Come to the house,
The house of Fathma Ullal. . . ."

It was the catch-song of the hour. All the bazaars of el-Korma were humming it.

"Fathma Ullal." Mustaffa Madani knew the name. She was a fat old Moroccan Jewess who dealt in pitiful wares—living wares—black and white and brown. . . .

"If you want hips,
Slim hips,
Come to the house,
The house of Fathma Ullal. . . ."

* * * *

One of the women came out on the street.

"Fifi Dagdag—Fifi the Trembler," they called her in el-Korma. A Frenchwoman trembling presumably through over-indulgence in hasheesh, there was gossip that she was the daughter of a former general in the French army who, ruined by gambling, had killed himself.

She clutched Mustaffa Madani's burnoose as he passed. She took up the negro's song with a belching, hiccoughy voice:

"If you want breasts,
White breasts. . . ."

He brushed her aside, disgusted, impatient.

Life—he thought—it was vice, it was filth; for the poor, the helpless.

"Dog! Dog! Dog!" Fifi shouted after him, in her metallic, highly accented Arabic. "May God rip up your belly! Ah—your daughter's nakedness for you!"

* * * *

He turned the corner.

The crowds changed. More Arabs here.

Here and there somebody recognized him and salaamed:

"The salute, Sidi!"

He paid no attention; hardly heard. He was in a despondent mood. His thoughts were bitter. His life seemed to him like his house: with the floor rotting under his feet, the walls sagging and threatening to tumble about his ears, the gates unhinged, the garden choked with weeds. Sterile, useless, pathetic, drab, it seemed to symbolize the decay that had come to him and his lineage.

And there was Gouthia. There was the old negress' warning . . . "the house in the street of Sidi-ben-Naim . . ." aye—the houses, here, in the coiling back alleys of el-Korma . . . and he was not cast in the mold of those who can think independently of their habits and prejudices, who can take Fate by the throat and force it to disgorge.

"What can I do . . . ?" He wondered dully. "What can I do?"

His path was the path of his ancestors, straight and right as he saw it straight and right. It seemed unfair, unreasonable, even immoral to ask him to leave this path.

He shrugged his shoulders with ungraceful resignation. He would consult the sheykh Abubekr Sabri, a wise man, the chief of the Molawees, the whirling dervishes, and his best friend—Allah! Allah!—his only friend.

And it was characteristic of the man that once he had made up his mind he had acted immediately,

without further deliberation, that he had not waited for the morning to call on the other.

* * * *

He turned south at the Bazaar of the Mutton-Butchers and walked through alleys that grew steadily more narrow and crooked, with a glimpse of smoky, discouraged sky above, the roof-tops revealing scarcely three yards of breadth, the roadway ankle deep in squidgy, sticky blue slime, beggars and lepers and roughs slinking past and pushing against him, until finally he found himself in the street of the Dervishes, a long cul-de-sac that ran the gamut of white-washed walls, broken here and there by tiny doors.

Sounds drifted through, the buzzing and zumming of voices, the staccato thumping of drums, the shrilling of reed pipes, and hysterical, isolated shouts:

"Allah Akbar!"

"W'ellah!"

"Ah b'illah!",

as, inside, the dervishes celebrated their queer, esoteric rites, whirling and chanting and shrieking their mystic, cosmic prayers to the Most High God.

Mustaffa Mandani stopped at the fifth door, raised the bronze knocker, dropped it.

Not long afterwards a novice opened and ushered him into a small, modestly furnished room where, a minute later, sheykh Abubekr Sabri joined him, salaaming with two fingers touching forehead, lips, and heart:

"The salute, Sidi!"

"The salute, Sabri effendi!"

"A late visitor, but always welcome, Sidi!"

Abubekr Sabri was a tall, lean, middle-aged man, with a thin, clean shaven, ascetic face. He was dressed in the ceremonial costume of the Molawee dervishes. On his head was a huge, conical cap of brown felt, with a dark blue cloth twisted about its base, and he wore a long, black cloak that half hid a tightly fitting, white jacket and a voluminous, pleated, balloon-like skirt of the same color, very full over the hips. When he moved this skirt bloated and twisted, like that of an old-fashioned ballerina.

He was a Turk of pure Osmanli stock who, though belonging to a military family, had been sent by his father to England and the Continent for school and university education. There, at first, the machine-made, machine-making civilization of the Occident had overwhelmed him, and so he had plucked with both fists at the tree of western wisdom; had steeped himself in European literature, philosophy, history, political principles, and cultural ideals; had deposed the God and Prophet and code of his ancestors and set up in their niches a number of brand-new, neat little idols labeled John Stuart Mill, Topinard, French Revolution, Lombroso, Ancient Greece, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Aryans, Nietzsche, Anti-Semitism, Herbert Spencer, Kropotkine, Karl Marx *et alias* . . . really an amazing mental hash . . . but then most young Orientals are inclined to be rather catholic in their tastes on their initial appearance in the European halls of learning.

Then, suddenly, almost overnight—and here again he was like most young Orientals abroad—revulsion had come to him; atavistic racial and religious recoil; complete and deliberate reversion to cultural type; systematic repercussion of soul and brain.

Reflux. Rebound.

Why?

A moot point.

He himself had forgotten the reason. Perhaps a slight argument about Orient and Occident that had grown heated and acrimonious. Perhaps a friend's patronizing remark. A woman's laugh. A slurring word overheard.

Or a mere jest?

Reason, trifling or grave. Whatever reason. No matter. There had been the result.

Revulsion.

And at the precise moment of revulsion he had crystallized in his heart all the hatred and contempt and disgust which Orient and Occident have felt for each other since, with Protestantism and Reformation, came intolerance and shoddy hypocrisy. Suddenly, deep in his sodden soul, had throbbed the old racial and cultural mistrust, with dull, muffled pulsings, with the shadows of creeping, unspeakable thoughts bursting up from the abyss of dead things.

He had remained in Europe a year or two longer.

For two reasons: to learn how to hate what formerly in the west he had admired and loved; and to master certain purely mechanical devices and systems of spreading knowledge which he might take back to his own people.

During the second period of his stay, he had discovered one of two things.

He had discovered that it is a titanic, heart-breaking task to prove the untruth or absurdity of anything which the Christians have made up their minds to accept as true or wise. He had found—the moment he declared himself an Oriental and an

equal—an iron phalanx of preconceived opinions and misread lessons of history. He had learned that the two main characteristics of the Aryans are a Pharisee intolerance and an unconscious generalization of those ideas which have been adopted for the sake of convenience, profit, or self-flattery.

"The whole fabric of Christian civilization I found tainted with that low, rather ritualistic form of hypocrisy which makes a man pretend for his own spiritual or material purposes that a thing is good which in his inmost heart he knows to be bad. Nations as well as individuals are judged by two factors: by their virtues and by their vices. As to virtues, what have the Christians done for the general uplift of the world which cannot be matched by a random look into the pages of Oriental history? And as to vices, is there any degeneracy rampant amongst us which is not equalled by the degeneracy of the western lands?"

These last lines are a quotation from his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Berlin.

Needless to say, he had not passed the examination, but had gone to Cairo where he had studied Islamic theology at al-Azar university, and had become first an itinerant Moslem priest, and finally a Molawee dervish.

* * * *

He lived now here, in the heart of el-Korma's African quarter, where he preached the lessons of the Koran, taught the mystic pomp and ritual of his Lodge to chosen initiates, and helped the poor and diseased with a free hand—he was a wealthy man—and a tolerant mind.

His was a peculiar trick of spreading a sort of

hush about him whenever he willed, of putting a volume of tranquil assurance into the faint, thin smile of his lips; and almost at once, as often in the past, Mustaffa Madani came under his friend's potent spell, and when the latter repeated that this, though a welcome, was a late visit, and that "there must be a reason, Sidi" and "you look worried, Sidi," he told him, already in a slightly less vexed frame of mind.

"So I came to you for advice, Sabri effendi," he wound up.

The other was silent for a while. But, like the desert, like the vaulting of a clear, tight, blue summer sky, he seemed endowed with a great repose that penetrated his own and Mustaffa Madani's soul with a profound and quieting influence. Behind the taciturnity of the sheykh the young novice, who had let Mustaffa Madani in and who had not left the room, hovered without noise.

He coughed now, suddenly, rather nervously; and Mustaffa Madani, who had not been aware of his presence near the door in the coiling, trooping shadows, looked up, saw him, seemed annoyed, and pointed arrogantly.

"Sabri effendi," he said, "this matter is between you and me."

The dervish smiled.

"Hassan is my beloved pupil, Sidi," he replied. "He is the apple of my eye and the soul of my soul. I have no secrets from him. No, no!" as Hassan turned to go. "Stay here, my son!"

"But—" objected Mustaffa Madani—"I do not wish to——"

"A Shareef, are you?" interrupted Abubekr Sabri

with a jest that was half steel. "And I, though a dervish, am an Osmanli, an Amurath! Hassan will remain. I am lost without my Hassan."

"Very well," grumbled Mustaffa Madani, while Hassan blushed.

* * * *

Hassan was young, not over twenty-five years of age. He was pale, and appeared ludicrously small and lean in his voluminous dervish costume. His head seemed too large for his bunched, rounded shoulders, too large for his thin neck. His only redeeming features were his nose, short, straight, high-bridged, and his grey, gold-flecked eyes.

These eyes, strangely, were resolute, fearless, entirely out of keeping with the rest of the man.

They were eyes of the desert, the soil, the clay.

* * * *

"Hassan," continued the sheykh, "is my pride. . . ."

"A relative?" asked Mustaffa Madani, casually.

"No—" laughed the other—"he was . . ."

"A bit of Saharan desert flotsam!" interrupted Hassan. "An orphan without father or mother! You—" he bowed and kissed the sheykh's hand which, after the proper Moslem manner, was rapidly snatched away—"have been father and mother to me. "Ah—" in quaint, archaic Bedawin parlance—"the Lord grant you increase of great cattle!"

"Hm . . ." Mustaffa Madani yawned rudely.

A shade of annoyance flitted across his face. Talk of this sort was painfully out of focus with his ideas and standards. Let a desert rat remain a desert rat, and a gentleman, a gentleman, was his creed.

"Interesting—doubtless—" he went on, ironically.

"But—what about the advice that I came to ask you, Sabri effendi?"

"Advice—?" smiled the other. "And what then can I tell you, Sidi?"

"You are a wise and godly man. There must be a path out of the mire to the seeing of your eyes."

"To find a path out of the mire without soiling one's slippers is scarcer than the nose of a lion. You cannot take without giving."

"I am not trying to take—anything."

"To remain as you do, unchanging, unchangeable, and to ask the ever-changing world to conform with you and your stony prejudices, is that not trying to take—everything? Your old servant is right. . . ."

"Are you, too, a match-maker?" came Mustaffa Madani's gruff rejoinder.

"No, no!" disclaimed the other.

He went on seriously:

"The world changes and moves. Everything changes and moves. So must you."

"I do not like it."

"Will your likes and dislikes influence the law of God, the law of nature?"

"Words?"

"No, Sidi! A fact!"

"Fact? Pah! But another word—another empty, tinkly, silly sound!"

"Which I shall prove to you, Sidi!" The sheykh rose. "God alone is changeless. Everything else forever changes and moves and gyrates—rhythmically. Come."

* * * *

He took his friend by the hand and, followed by Hassan, took him into the *tekké*, the Lodge itself of

the Molawee dervishes, where the latter were attending to their nightly, esoteric ritual.

There, with the oil lamps weaving fantastic, heliotrope shadows and a great incense burner sending up spirals and clouds of scented smoke and the music of drums and reed pipes droning in a melancholy, minor key, then suddenly peaking up into a shriek, again dying away in trembling cadences, the Molawees were whirling giddily around and around, looking like gigantic tops with their tall, conical hats and their balloon-like skirts spinning in wide, circular motions. They swayed and whirled, swayed and whirled, swayed and whirled, their eyes glassy, their faces tense and ecstatic, each man with a hand on his neighbor's shoulder, linked together in a flexible chain—and as Mustaffa Madani stared minute after minute, first cynically amused, then fascinated, then with a certain superstitious fear in his heart, it seemed to him as if, gradually, the lamps, the floor, the whole room, and he himself, his own brain and soul, were joining in the dance, were whirling away to the swing of the music in a great rhythm—and there was in his ear the sheykh's voice, whispering softly and subtly:

"Everything forever moves and whirls, thus breathes and lives, through the strength of the faith. A deed, a gesture, a motion, is a better prayer than a word, Sidi. See—we Molawees move and whirl as moves and whirls the earth, the constellations, all creation, around Allah's never-ending unity. And you—a Shareef, a descendant of the Prophet—on Him peace and the blessings——? Doubtless. But are you beyond the eternal law? Can you refuse to move and whirl—rhythmically, cosmically? Can you refuse

to change? Look, Sidi!" he exclaimed as the devotees jerked away in a great, smooth wind, like enormous white bells spinning monotonously.

* * * *

Mustaffa Madani felt strangely affected.

The incense dried his mouth. It bulged his eyes. The music droned in his brain.

A spasm of excitement ran through his body from head to toe; seemed to electrify him.

It was partly fear; partly an incredible, trembling elation; yet sensuous straight through; a stiffening and bloating of every sexual reaction in his body.

A yell rose in his contracted throat.

His legs and arms began to twitch, then to move in rhythmic gyrations, while all the time the hard, fact-sober cells of his tough brain observed these reactions as if they were those of an alien body, disapproving of them, ridiculing them, endeavoring to restrain them . . . trying to put back his feet on the solid, clayey earth of his knowing; to scuttle back his emotions to their safe, accustomed grooves; to jerk back his mind to that stagnation which he mistook for balance. But the instinct was stronger than the will. Life was no longer a stationary fact. It was mutation. It was rhythm. It was alterative mood. It was a spiral mounting and rising and swinging. It was a symbolic image with wings. It was perfect, unceasing motion reaching up to perfect, unceasing knowledge.

He was about to leap into the centre of the *tekké* and to join in the dervish dance when Abubekr Sabri, who had been watching him closely, put a hand on his arm and broke the spell.

"Come!" he said.

Followed by Hassan he led him back into the small room.

"You have understood?" he asked.

"I have understood—a little—" replied Mustaffa Madani, musingly—"yes—a little. . . ."

* * * *

Perhaps it was the inflection of his own voice, the tremulous, nervous accent so strange to his character: but, suddenly, with almost physical violence, he found himself wrenched back into the world as he lived and interpreted it.

"And yet . . ." he added.

* * * *

He spoke just those two words:

"And yet . . ."

Spoke them in a flat, brittle voice.

Mockingly spread a high-veined hand. Stared straight, challengingly, defiantly, at Abubekr Sabri.

* * * *

The latter laughed frankly; more at himself than at his friend. He told himself that he had underestimated Mustaffa Madani's desert-bred obstinacy.

"I shall not be able to make a dervish of you—not until the rust and grime of great grief will have purified your soul—you stubborn old mule!" he exclaimed. "Stubborn enough to hammer cold iron! Stubborn enough to fish for the moon reflected in water! Stubborn enough to talk Arabic in the house of a Berber!"

Then, very gently, for he loved the hard-headed old aristocrat with an almost quixotic tenderness and saw his lips tightening into a thin, tense line, he added:

"No, no. I am not trying to change you or your

prejudices—at least not all your prejudices. Nor—" he smiled—"am I a match-maker. If you do not want your seed to continue—well and good. You are the father, the master. But even so—the world changes. Come. Admit it."

"Oh . . ." Mustaffa Madani was thoroughly himself again, relentless, wary, suspicious. "I . . ."

"Admit it!" insisted the sheykh. "There are no longer the days of the free desert, of the wind in your face and the crackle of steel in your ear, of food for the asking and gold for the taking and horses for the mating."

"True—cursed be the French—cursed be all foreigners, all Christians—who come into our lands, like robbers, like thieves in the night . . . pigs all and fathers of pigs—lying, avaricious, hypocritical, unclean!"

"Cursed be they indeed! I bear them no love. I know them. I lived amongst them, in their own land. But I am not fool enough to put my hand between the bear and his fodder, unless my hand be gloved with steel. The Christians are here, strong and pitiless. We are here, weak and—yes—puling. The day will come—may Allah grant it be soon!—when we shall pour out their blood upon the edge of the red sword. But this day is not here yet. In the meantime, rather endure the flatulencies of the camels than the prayers of the fishes, Sidi. Why fight the inevitable—before you are strong enough to change it? Consider your daughter. What will she do after your death?"

"What indeed?"

"You do not want her to marry?"

"Never one who is not of the lineage."

"Nor do you want to make your peace with the French?"

"Only a moment ago you said yourself that . . ."

"That I do not love them, Sidi. Nor do I. But I am not a fool. The fingers which you cannot bite, kiss them and put them upon your head—until you be strong enough to bite them!"

"Not I!"

"Wah! You are like the bear, neither to be milked, led in the procession, nor ridden! Come. Be wise. Go to the French. Take them by the hand today—and you can take them by the throat tomorrow. Salaam to the wicked monkey—as long as he is in power. Later on you can cut off his tail, to clean out your nose with. Only the other day I talked with the governor-general. He mentioned your name, knowing that I am your friend. He is still willing to appoint you to an honorable position—even to a lucrative position."

"And thereby stain my burnoose, and dishonor my race and faith? No! *Insh'allah mah teshoof es-shurr* —may the Lord God not let us see the evil!"

"A very holy sentiment—" said the sheykh, impatiently. "But I have been told that religion is always on the lips of the liar and the courtezan—and the fool!"

"If I am a fool, God made me one."

"Lucky for you. Otherwise there would be no forgiving you. And so after your death—may it be many years before you reach Paradise—Gouthia must earn her own living, since you are unwilling or unable to provide."

"Her—own living——?"

"Yes."

"Oh . . ."

Mustaffa Madani sat up straight. He had heard tales about Christian and Jewish women going out into the world's coarse tumult, working like men, competing with men for the sake of a gold coin. Tales exotic, incredible, ludicrous, even barbarous to his interpretation of life's essentials.

But—his daughter—his own daughter . . .

"Earn her own living——?" he stammered. "She—a girl—a girl of the lineage. . . ."

"Even a girl of the lineage must eat if she wishes to live—and beans cost money—even worm-eaten beans."

"True!" agreed Mustaffa Madani dully, after a pause.

"Good. But how is she going to do it?" continued the sheykh. "How is she going to earn her own living? Do you know, Sidi?"

"No, Sabri effendi."

"I do."

"Ah——?"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

"There is just one way—just one path out of the mire of your stubborness."

"Namely?"

"She must become a teacher, Sidi."

* * * *

Mustaffa Madani's thoughts whirled.

He was utterly beyond his depths, seemed in a very quagmire of conditions and conceptions of life whose existence, heretofore, he had at times vaguely dreamed of, had always vaguely ridiculed.

"Teach——?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Teach—what? Teach—whom?"

"I am not like you, Sidi. I change with the changing world. The French have schools. So have the Jews. And many Moslem children go to these schools—and what becomes of them? They forget their own race, their own faith, their own proud civilization and traditions. So, with the government's permission, speaking honeyed words and not telling them altogether the truth in the back of my brain, I founded two schools, one for boys, the other for girls, where they learn modern things, yet in the spirit of our own race, not the foreigners'. We have enough teachers for the boys, men like Hassan and other young dervishes. But it is hard to find women teachers, for the girls. We have only one, a Syrian woman trained at an American college in Constantinople. We need more women teachers, Arabs, Moslems, like your daughter. But what does she know? She can press perfume from flower petals. She can sing a little. She can embroider a little—I daresay. Charming accomplishments, I grant you. But—worthless."

"Worthless——?"

"To us. We teach a certain amount of book knowledge and a great many practical things. Gouthia must acquire a foundation of both before she can teach others. But who will teach her? I cannot spare the Syrian woman—she is busy all day. Therefore . . ."

"Therefore——?" echoed the other, listlessly, half guessing what was coming.

"A man must teach her."

* * * *

Mustaffa Madani did not reply at once.

He was shocked to the core of his Shareefian prejudices. But he knew that the sheykh was right in everything, that there was no other path out of the mire.

A sob shook his massive frame. He opened and shut his hands convulsively.

Abubekr Sabri watched him. He saw how the man's pride was bleeding; pitied him profoundly.

But he could not help him. It was fate. It was life. God-made. Thus just.

"I . . . I . . ." began Mustaffa Madani.

His voice failed him.

Perhaps for the first time in his life tears were in his eyes. And it was not easy for him to weep. Drop by drop the tears had to be forced out of that tough, unyielding soul, hurting him almost physically.

* * * *

The sheykh took his friend's cold hand. He raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"You cannot do otherwise, Sidi," he said. "It is a sending of fate."

"Yes. Fate—like a grey, slimy snake, pressing out my life—my race—my pride . . ."

All at once he flared into vehemence.

"Allah curse the French, the foreigners, who brought this dishonor upon my house!" He lifted his hands in savage prayer to God. His eyes blazed. "Let their women be childless, O Allah! Forgive not, O Allah, their trespasses! Destroy them utterly!"

His words jumbled, choked.

Then, just as suddenly, he controlled himself. He dropped his hands. He looked up, dry-eyed, hard-faced.

"I am helpless," he said. "I submit."

And, with all the courtesy of his breed, salaaming deeply with clasped hands:

"I am grateful to you, Sabri effendi. My gratitude is at your feet—a carpet."

Then, after a pause:

"You will look for a teacher?"

"I have already found one, Sidi."

"Whom?"

"Hassan—the apple of my eye."

"You mean——" Mustaffa Madani pointed casually, arrogantly—"him——?"

"Yes."

"Hm . . ."

Mustaffa Madani stepped up to Hassan. He looked him up and down, his lips curling in a slow, thin smile.

The younger man was embarrassed. He was even, somehow, afraid. For Mustaffa Madani was so big, and he himself was so weak, so puny. For a moment his face grew livid. But he did not give in to his nervousness. His resolute eyes met Mustaffa Madani's unbridled eyes with an unflinching, slightly contemplative glance.

"Yes," he said. "I."

"Hm . . ." the other repeated the insolent monosyllable. "You—eh . . . ?"

"Nor," continued Hassan, fear still in his heart, but the blood in his brain pulsing coldly, intelligently, "shall I become your daughter's teacher because of any especial love or respect for you and your Shareefian clan."

"No——?" asked Mustaffa Madani, sardonically.

"No! I do it because the sheykh orders it."

Again Mustaffa Madani's lips curled in a thin, slow smile.

Then, suddenly, he burst into laughter; laughter that dropped like a blight.

"And," he said, staring at the younger man, "for a few moments I was afraid. Afraid because a man was to teach my daughter. Ho! There is no need yet in my house of eunuchs and bright sword to guard my honor and my daughter's virginity. Your face cuts off all danger."

He turned to the sheykh.

"When will you send him?" he asked.

* * * *

Abubekr Sabri was looking at Hassan with a steady glance that begged and caressed and apologized. And Hassan, whose livid face was now streaked with red, shrugged his shoulders.

"Tomorrow morning at eleven, Sidi," replied the sheykh.

"Again thanks, effendi," said Mustaffa Madani.

He salaamed and left.

* * * *

It was very late.

The African quarter was deserted except for, here and there, an isolated fragment of human life, a bit of desert flotsam tossed upon the stony waves of the street: a patriarchal old Bedawin squatting in a postern, a flickering oil lamp shadow-painting his bearded, hollow, austere cheeks, his beak of a nose, his opaque, hooded eyes—like a dark, bitter film of Scriptural memories; a black giant of Timbuktoo, drunk with hasheesh, belching a ribald bazaar song up to the moon's elfin green miracle; a beggar in

front of a mosque, half asleep, but still whining his eternal plaint:

"Alms for the love of Allah. . . ."

Mustaffa Madani skirted the edge of a cemetery where the graves dreamed with cluttered, brittle emblems; walked on beneath a vaulted sky, purple, silver dusted, and out on the desert's rim a screen of palm trees leaning against the sky's base with lanky, nostalgic arms; arrived at his house that reached out at him suddenly from the tangle of the hectic, encroaching bazaars; opened the gate as morning was beginning to boom on the horizon with a golden, staccato, wedge-like gesture.

Very faintly, as he dropped off to sleep, he could hear an indistinct drone of voices from his daughter's room.

The old negress was still telling Gouthia the tale of her youth, and embroidering—good soul—its fabric with the tinselly glitter of imagined romance:

"There was also a man of the Iron Tribes, a wide-stepper in the councils of chiefs, a breaker of hearts, a twirler of spears, strong-armed, mighty-thewed, of lusty and impatient manhood. He fought for the sake of my love—*hayah!* but my love was sweet and soft—fought for three days and four nights, and seven chiefs he killed single-handed and twenty-one chiefs' sons and of warriors five score—may Allah shrivel my liver if I lie!" She smiled; caressed the girl's cheeks. "Do you find pleasure in my love's motley tale, soul of my soul?"

Gouthia stared straight ahead.

"A day that is not your own day, would you reckon it as of your own life?" she asked. "A kiss

that is not your own kiss, would you reckon it of your own love . . . ?"

* * * *

Gouthia met Hassan the next day when her father introduced him with a few slurred, bitter words, leaving the room shortly afterwards. El-Fosiha was sitting on her heels in a corner, watching with her old bright eyes.

She met him with undisguised hostility. She looked at his Arabic books with undisguised contempt.

She, too, was of the Shareefs. She did not care for learning, for knowledge, the fruit of learning. She took no interest in it. She did not even respect it vicariously, in others. She desired none of it for herself. She resisted it instinctively as well as consciously. Learning, after all, is primarily the result of democratic thought, of democratic broadcasting. It is the mob's disorganizing brain pitted against the aristocracy's organizing fist. It is the weapon of the masses in their fight with the classes.

Gouthia did not know the word democracy nor its Arabic equivalent. But she felt it. And what she felt of it was to her essentially base and sinister and hideous, betraying its origin; a thing mulched and manured with mental sweat and cerebral dung; rather unclean. It was both subtlety and cleverness. Jews were subtle. Christians were clever. The former knew how to argue acutely; the latter how to analyze keenly. Both brought about a superfluity of material wants, and a prodigality of endeavors, to supply these wants. Wants as well as endeavors were ugly; were not worthwhile. Both painted happiness on the outer, instead of the inner walls of their

houses, their lives. Aristocrats created what they needed. Democracy needed what it created.

To Gouthia's inherited, medieval, aristocratic reasoning knowledge was a specialty of these Jews and Christians who had overrun the land like greedy, noisy locusts. It was a commodity, nothing else; a bazaar product; really rather contemptible.

In former years, when the high-pooped Tunisian and Algerian privateers had roamed the Mediterranean from Gibraltar to the Golden Horn, her ancestors had occasionally captured Christian slaves who were wise in certain ways, with their brains on their hands; quite valuable; at times amusing, as monkeys are amusing, or trained parrots. They had used these white slaves as in the United States a planter had used a black slave; with decency; even generosity; even, in some cases, personal liking; but never with the proper respect of simple, human companionship.

Cattle with brains. Cattle plodding through the furrows of learning, as oxen plod through the furrows of small-grained wheat. One ate wheat. One bought it in bags and boxes if one did not grow it. Thus one bought knowledge.

Slave labor formerly. Today bazaar labor; bazaar barter. University. Schools. Both bazaars. Just bazaars. Mental piece-goods. Metaphysical cabbage.

And here was this dervish, this contemptible huckster of contemptible learning—to teach her. . . .

But—"it is fate, little daughter," her father had said. "There is no other way. It seems that you must stuff your small head with knowledge as el-Fosiha stuffs a cucumber."

And Mustaffa Madani had gone to his room to smoke his hasheesh pipe.

It was his one vice; was becoming daily more so. He took refuge in the kindly, acrid, philosophic drug; blessed the Prophet because it was cheap.

He smoked.

Six pipes. Seven pipes.

The noises of the outer world seemed far away. There was, after a while, just a memory of street cries lifting their hungry, starved arms; just a murmur of whispering desert wind chasing the morning clouds that clawed at the sun's gold with cool, slim fingers of white and silver.

Another murmur. So faint. From the next room. The drifting of Gouthia's voice. . . .

Little Gouthia. Learning. . . .

A slow smile overspread his features. He stared at the rolling hasheesh clouds. They seemed filled with a roaring sunset of colors, fox brown and steel blue and purple, like the colors of his past dreams moving and blazing before him, changing into his future dreams. . . .

Little Gouthia . . . learning. . . .

* * * *

Through the meshes of her face veil Gouthia looked at her teacher, and the thought came to her that this was the ugliest young man whom she had ever seen.

The thought, somehow, pleased her; subtly changed their mutual position of teacher and pupil in relative values, making him less and her more important; even—illogically—making him less objectionable.

Her lips tightened.

She had some of her father's chilly ruthlessness, overlaid by a strictly feminine desire to tease and ridicule.

She took a seat cross-legged on a pillow. She pointed at another.

"Sit down," she said curtly.

He obeyed. He put his books on a small taboret between them.

"Your name is Hassan?" she asked.

"Yes."

"How came you by such a name?"

"Why not, Bibi Gouthia?"

"It is a fighter's name—the name of the Prophet's son—gloriously killed in battle—while you are . . ."

"Only a student, a dervish. I know."

He looked at her; saw her very young and slight; with a glint of russet gold in the stray locks that escaped from her head shawl, her eyes above the face veil brown and fearless and utterly candid.

"I am sorry that you hate me, Bibi Gouthia," he continued.

"I cannot help it, Hassan. I do hate you."

"Why?"

"Because!"

"At least you are honest."

"Forgive me, Hassan. I must speak as I feel."

"And do you always speak as you feel?"

Hassan smiled; and Gouthia had a fleeting impression that his smile was not altogether unpleasant.

"Always!" she replied.

Then. sharply, as she saw his lips twitch and quiver and heard a rumbling, incoherent sound bubbling from his lips, she exclaimed:

"Hassan!"

"What, Bibi Gouthia?"

"You are laughing!"

"Yes."

"Are you laughing at me?"

"No."

"Why did you laugh?"

"I—I didn't."

"You did. I heard you. You said yourself that you did. Why do you lie?"

"Oh . . ."

"I never imagined that a dervish would lie!"

"Oh—it was only a laugh of sympathy."

"I do not want your sympathy."

"Mutual sympathy, Bibi Gouthia," he went on. "I feel for you because Fate forced me on you as a teacher. And I hope that you feel for me because Fate forced you on me as a pupil."

"You are rude, Hassan!"

"Am I?"

"Very rude! Do they not teach you manners in the *tekké* of the Molawee dervishes?"

"I am not rude. Only honest. Just as you are honest!"

"Ho! Ho!" came el-Fosiha's voice from the corner. "An artful twister of words! By my honor!"

The old negress broke into a paroxym of jungle mirth. Hassan laughed aloud; and, as his eyes opened wide, Gouthia noticed that they were kindly eyes, deep, gold flecked, resolute.

The very next moment she was conscious of two distinct surprises. One was that she did not hate him at all; the other that for the first time in her life she was talking to a man, not to one of her

father's middle-aged acquaintances who occasionally came to the house and treated her like a little girl still taken up with dolls, nor to a shopkeeper in the bazaar, but to a young man, a strange man, and that she could talk to him quite easily, without embarrassment.

She did not even mind her face veil. It did not seem a very formidable barrier to conversation and sympathy.

She looked at him again with her candid, searching glance.

Yes. He was small and ugly. Very small. Very ugly. There was no doubt of it.

Lines furrowed his forehead. His beard and eyebrows were too scanty. His lips were pale. A pimple reddened his left nostril. His ears were large. So were his feet, his hands.

But then there were his eyes. Very nice eyes, she decided. And so open and steady.

And his voice. It was soft and low. Rather attractive. Beguiling.

Still—a huckster in mental piece-goods; a nobody!

But—her father had explained the situation to her; after his death she would have to earn her own living; would have to become a teacher.

There was no other way.

* * * *

A teacher!

Suddenly she, too, laughed.

She had always dreamed of life beyond the walls, beyond the veil.

A teacher—why—here was her chance. . . .

* * * *

"Hassan!" she said sternly. "We are wasting time. You are here to teach me things."

"Yes, Bibi Gouthia," he replied. He opened a book. "Do you love poetry?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"Why, Hassan?"

"Because of your eyes."

"Oh. . . ."

"Indeed." He slurred; paused; went on: "Well—let us begin the first lesson with poetry."

He looked for a passage in the book; found it; read aloud, in a clear, soft voice:

"Our old moon put her horns away and the dark nights were three;
There danced a girl-moon through the clouds, pallid as ivory.
At break of day one green star went patroling down the sky,
Just as the lonely watchman with a lantern passing by. . . ."

She clapped her hands.

"Lovely!" she exclaimed.

"Isn't it?"

"Who wrote it, Hassan?"

"Ibn al-Motazz."

"Who was he?"

"A poet of Bagdad of eleven hundred years ago, when Islam was at the height of her glory—under the rule of your ancestors. . . ."

And so, smilingly, he began telling her of Bagdad's great caliphs, of Arab history and arts and letters.

When she wanted to know more, he passed the book over to her.

"Here—" he said—"read for yourself, Bibi Gouthia."

"I cannot read."

She said it nonchalantly. She was not at all embarrassed or ashamed.

"Very shocking!" came his short comment.

"Why?"

"Because you are ignorant, quite ignorant."

"Bah!" she replied calmly. "I am of the Shareefs."

"No excuse for ignorance. Your own ancestor, the Prophet Mohammed—on Him peace and the blessings!—could read and write."

"Could He?"

"Of course. Did He not write the Koran?"

"Oh—I suppose so—" admitted Gouthia.

"And do you then despise the Prophet—on Him peace and the blessings!—because of it?"

"Of course not."

"Then why not learn to read and write yourself?"

"Oh. . . ."

"You must!"

"Must—" haughtily—"I?"

"Yes," he said. "If you wish to become a teacher. Come. It is not difficult."

He drew paper, pens, and a long dervish inkstand from his waist shawl, and showed her the Arabic alphabet, slowly, patiently, letter for letter, making her memorize them, correcting her as, clumsily, diffidently, she tried to copy them.

"It is not difficult," he repeated. "Come. Speak after me: *'aleph—be—te—tse—gim—hha—kha—'* " until gradually they reached the end of the alpha-

bet: *"'Mim—noon—ouaou—he—ie—'"* He smiled. "There! Not hard, is it?"

"On the contrary. Very hard. But I shall learn and succeed."

"Allah be blessed! There speaketh a Shareef! There speaketh one of the lineage!"

Gravely he meant and spoke the compliment. Gravely she accepted it.

"Shall I some day be able to read all books?" she asked.

"I hope so," he replied. "But the greatest books are not written with the alphabet, nor are they read with the eye. You cannot read them without a key."

"What key?"

"The key of your own soul, Bibi Gouthia."

Again he smiled. Again she thought that he had nice eyes, deep, clear, resolute.

He rose.

"Shall I come at the same time tomorrow, Bibi Gouthia?"

"Please. And—" she hesitated.

"Yes——?"

"I hate you no longer, Hassan."

"I am glad." He bowed. "The salute, Bibi Gouthia!"

"The salute, Hassan!"

"The salute!" chimed in el-Fosiha, wakening from the light sleep of old age.

* * * *

Thereafter, six times a week, every day except Friday, the blessed day of rest for all things created, Gouthia sat on her pillow, facing Hassan and imbibing knowledge.

As to knowledge, while she learned, she never

liked nor respected it; found no satisfaction in her own progress. Perhaps, here and there, she enjoyed a poem or stray thought; or thrilled at a glancing back into the history of the Arab nation and Moslem faith both of which were so inalienably the history of her own Shareefian blood. But her reactions as to learning and knowledge never changed, not until the end of her life. While the horizon of her mentality lifted more and more, she did not feel the pleasure of it, the pleasure of greater, fuller life pouring in; did not feel, beneath the accumulated knowledge of others which she acquired slowly and tenaciously, her own mind growing and stretching, widening and deepening; nor if, subconsciously, it did grow and stretch, widen and deepen, was it to her a flowering in beauty. She conceived knowledge, in the last analysis, as a rather despicable outside element from which she might borrow a certain practical driving power as a sail borrows from a rising wind.

But she liked Hassan better and better.

With her characteristic, superb honesty she told herself that he was not the type of man who she had ever dreamed could interest her. The veil of Islam cloaks the face; cloaks not the imagining. So, formerly, she had imagined to herself—imagined as coming into her life—a man who was a composite picture of her father, her father's tales, and el-Fosiha's tales: an Arab of course, and, like the nurse's Ashanti lovers, a strong, merciless, swashbuckling warrior; too, since she was an Oriental girl, familiar, if vicariously, with sex and all the twisting ramifications of sex reactions, a man of

subtle sexual approach, but tremendous, tireless sexual strength.

Hassan was unlike all these former imaginings.

Yet, with that same honesty of hers she owned up presently that whenever she heard his footfall —she recognized his footfall—in the outer hall, she felt in her heart, not a thrill, nor the expectation of a thrill, nor exactly an elation, but a peculiar, half painful unquietness; and then one day she made the discovery that the hours during which he taught her were underlined in her remembrance with scarlet and gold; that, somehow, this small, puny, ugly young man was wedging his personality into her life with a great and easy speed that was immeasurable and that brought a brimming joy mingling with awed confusion.

She was not like a young American or English girl. She had no friends of her own sex and age to talk to, to confide in, to share her gaieties and sorrows and doubts.

There was el-Fosiha. True. But the latter was after all a Saharan savage with just a thin veneer of Islamic civilization, and in spite of the mutual love there was no bond of understanding.

So Gouthia was thrown back on her own mental and emotional resources; and the more she thought, the more she tried to combat and suppress these thoughts, the more she felt that Hassan was growing into her consciousness—her physical as well as her psychic consciousness.

* * * *

She puzzled if it was love. Doubted it at first.

She had always pictured love as a sublime reach-

ing and sweeping. And what she really felt with Hassan was the absolute and vital necessity of his life to hers, the steadily increasing conviction that she needed him, that she could not do without him, that life without him would be only stinking dregs.

Beneath his puny body and under his tranquil, scholarly peacefulness she felt a strong soul, perfectly adjusted, proportioned and balanced, perfectly sure of itself; and in his deep, resolute eyes she read a great kindliness, an extraordinary power of sympathy, willingness to understand, a priceless gift of tenderness and insight.

* * * *

There was yet something else.

For she compared Hassan with her father.

She loved the latter with an unflinching, unquestioning loyalty; loved him perhaps more with loyalty than with love. But as she watched him at meal time or at night on the roof-top, she told herself that she knew him, every word of his lips, every gesture of his hands, every throb of his blood. She could and did fathom him completely. But she could not fathom the young dervish. There was something in back of his eyes, in back of his brain and soul which fascinated her and which she wished to read. She felt the man's personality with a double intensity: an intensity of sensation, and an intensity of perception. Perhaps—though she did not put it to herself in these words—he was just life to her, nascent life, running clear and strong, and not merely an incident, an inserted wedge of life, a gesture, vivid or faint, that would pass presently into the dark like a sheet of foam.

* * * *

She wondered what Hassan felt about her—Hassan who, had she known, had loved her from the first with a love deeper than the dwelling of kings; a love that made each morning to him a new and glorious miracle of the single fact of her existence and that danced in his blood with the wayward song of spring.

It was desire. But it was more than desire. It was friendship and tenderness and deep liking. It was gold. It was perfume. It was a flower. It was the sun and the moon and all the stars. It drove through his soul and body with a thousand spears.

* * * *

She was the first woman who had come into his life. His love was virginal.

Not because of moral or physical scruples. But, perhaps, through lack, heretofore, of opportunity.

For there were the years of his life as they had been.

The first seventeen years, his parents dead, spent with his grandmother in the Bedawin encampment far in the south.

Memories of these years. Memories of work. Just work. Work without beauty. Work without future. Work without endeavor.

Peasants. The tilling of the few stony acres. The herding of the half dozen goats. The tending of the lonely milch-camel. The sheer toil of the raw, red clay that was both the right and the burden of his Bedawin inheritance.

Bitter years. A child, he; and on his childish, puny shoulders the work of herder and husbandman.

His daily, broken retreat before the brutish forces

of the earth, with always the long pain of the brown, clogged furrows, and the sun in his face and the harsh rise of the hill, and the straying of cattle, and an occasional fight with marauding tribesmen.

A blunting of animal senses. A blunting of human tenderness. Life amongst the black tents—black as the tents of Keddar in Hebrew Scripture—was too hard and too bitter. It could not rise above the tough facts of the soil, the cold congruities of the glebes. Few Bedawin women had more than two children. Fallow fields. Fallow wombs. Passion here was never joy. Passion, too, was work; a hateful duty; a dull, back breaking straining of muscle and tissue and spine.

* * * *

After his grandmother's death, he had gone north to el-Korma. By chance he had wandered into the *tekké* of the Molawee dervishes. There amidst the whirling limbs, the grey, swirling incense, and the droning music, the "call" had come to him. He had joined the Molawes eight years earlier.

More work. Work of the brain, the spirit. Learning. Wisdom. Obedience. Discipline. Resignation. Faith. Islam.

No women. Nor desire for women.

Now woman had come to him. And desire. Gouthia.

He tried to dissect this feeling so as to forget it; did not succeed.

Profound it seemed, mystical, yet logical in its utter, basic sense like the mating of wind and fire. Poignant it seemed and restless and radiant and inscrutable. Inevitable it seemed, like the Molawee dervishes' whirling dance before the changeless unity

of the Lord God, like the forces that bind the planets and the seven suns. Unerring it seemed, like a stream flowing to its sea goal.

He knew that his desire would never be fulfilled.

For who was he, a poor dervish, once a loutish Bedawin peasant, he asked himself, that she should give him her love?

And, suppose she did, there was her father, with his haughty, ironic greeting whenever they met:

"Ah—the salute, Sir Ink-Grinder!"

Or:

"Must I get me a eunuch to guard my daughter's honor? A eunuch—*hayah, hayah*—to watch a eunuch!"

Yet Hassan hoped. Hoped against hope.

There was a saying which was frequently on the sheykh Abubekr Sabri's lips:

"Once in the life of each man—sayeth the Koran—comes to him his chance for happiness or woe. Once. And only once. And while all else is written from the beginning in the book of each man's life by the Angel of the Scrolls—sayeth the Koran—there is left one page whereon each is permitted to trace, himself, the record of his choice."

The saying was with him, always. And with it, always, was the feeling that he was reaching toward some amazing beauty of fate which would sift the glory of gold and fire about his life's dull ways.

Flesh. The pain of the flesh stiffening with longing. Spreading its tide into every corner of his being, causing the mighty, impatient strings of life within him to quiver with an exquisite agony. . . .

* * * *

Often in those days Hassan borrowed the sheykh Abubekr Sabri's blue-mottled stallion and rode into the desert to clear his brain. Out there the strength of the waste, yellow lands, the spawning of the eternal sands would come to him with a mighty surge, a feeling of elation and elemental, savage energy, a wish and will to succeed, to gallop back to el-Korma, to take Gouthia in his arms and tell her the full tale of his love—in spite of everything.

But when he entered her house and passed, perhaps, her father in the outer hall, heard the latter's withering: "Ah—the salute, Sir Ink-Grinder!", the resolution would tumble about his ears like a house made of cards.

He mentioned it one night to Abubekr Sabri. He had to speak of it. He could no longer contain the secret within himself.

"But—" said Abubekr Sabri with mild reproof—"she is . . ."

"A Shareef. I know. And I—" Hassan shrugged his shoulders—"I am not of the lineage. I am a desert rat." He sighed. "The stones are hard on the path of my life."

"The stones are hard everywhere, everywhere," said the other.

"I know."

Hassan paused; mused. He raised his thin arms in a high, wooden gesture.

"Oh—" he exclaimed—"I wish—I wish I could . . . and you—you yourself—you say often that there is one page in the book of each man's life whereon he is permitted to trace, himself, the record of his choice. . . ."

"But—are you strong enough to write this record——?"

"I am weak—weak . . . I . . ." Hassan slurred; was silent; sat brooding and unhappy.

"Youth dreams," smiled Abubekr Sabri. "Then night dies. Comes young day. Day of facts. And the dream is forgotten—a thing of star dust."

"My love is not a dream. It is the fact of day."

"Then pray to the Prophet—peace on Him. Seek your refuge in Allah, the Lord of Daybreak."

"I shall try."

"Perhaps—if you wish—I can send another teacher in your place. There is Mohammed el-Yezdi. . . ."

"No, no, no!"—vehemently—"I . . ."

"I understand." Abubekr Sabri interrupted very gently. "Even the dust of the rose petal is better than no rose at all, eh?"

"Yes!"—dully.

* * * *

So Hassan tried to strangle the love in his heart. He was ever the same to Gouthia, rather impersonal, good-humored, patient. Only twice did he give way a little to his feelings; but so gently and fleetingly that she never guessed the tumult that lay back of his words.

Once, in the midst of a lesson and without any special reason, he rose, salaamed deeply, and said: "*Ana sahibaq*—I am your very friend!"

And another time, when she had recited a poem, he told her that her speech was like herself.

"How?" she asked.

"*Loghrat et-teyr*—sweet as the chittering of birds," he replied.

* * * *

"Sweet as the chittering of birds," he repeated to himself as he left her house to return to the *tekké* of the Molawee dervishes through el-Korma's teeming streets.

Spring had come to these streets overnight.

It brushed through the ancient, coiling alleys on quivering, gauzy pinions. It hovered, bird-like, over the flat, white roof-tops. It gilded the minaret of the Mosque of the Five Swords. It dropped liquid silver over the toil of the mazed, scabbed streets. It painted Mustaffa Madani's neglected garden with pastel shades of rose and heliotrope and delicate green; painted rainbow tints in the stinking, sticky puddles of the African quarter. It mirrored the dance of stars and fleecy clouds in a thousand windows. It clothed the farther desert with a mantle of amethyst and gold. It added music to the strident calls of pavement and gutter. It sharpened the pain of longing in Hassan's heart; coursed through his body as with the blood of some infinite, intolerable yearning.

He passed Mustaffa Madani who was on his way to the Bazaar of the Moroccan Jews.

He greeted him politely:

"The Lord remember you for good!"

* * * *

Mustaffa Madani did not reply. Perhaps he had not seen the other, nor heard his words.

He was in a despondent mood.

* * * *

At night these last few weeks, after the women had gone to bed, his hasheesh pipe was always lit.

The acrid drug of the hemp was his one consolation. On the grey wings of its smoke the ma-

terial, hurting substance of outer life floated gradually away.

Outer life. Present life. So ugly. So degrading. So dishonoring.

Christians; selfish, canting, lying. Jews; subtle, specious, quibbling, cheating. Christians and Jews —cursed be all unbelievers!—owning everything; spoiling everything; stealing everything.

Incoherent hate seared his heart.

He smoked another pipe.

Allah! Allah! Give me the sword when it is red, and the strength of the sword!

Christians and Jews. So evil.

There was in his remembrance that chapter of the Koran called The Quaking—speaking of the day when the earth shall quake with the quaking, and when the earth hath cast forth her burdens, and men shall say: "What aileth her?"—the day when the earth shall tell out her tidings because the Lord God doth inspire her—the day when men shall come in companies from their graves to behold the works of their hands, and whosoever hath wrought an ant's weight of good shall behold it, and whosoever hath wrought an ant's weight of evil shall behold it. . . .

Allah! Allah! The evil wrought by these foreigners—they shall behold it . . . shall see it mirrored in the flames of hell. . . .

He smoked another pipe. The seventh pipe. The pipe of forgetting.

Forgetting the present. Remembering the past.

His soul reached out lean, hungry, nostalgic hands to this past, his former life, so fair and satisfying; away from his loneliness, his failure.

The hasheesh sizzled with a reedy, fluting song. There was no other sound. Even the whispering night wind had died. The street cries had guttered out like spent candles.

Hours of consolation. Hours of beauty.

The air filled with scented fog. The few objects scattered about him on roof-top lost their outlines. He felt a confused sensation in the marrow of his bones and his muscles, some of which seemed to soften and almost to melt away, while others seemed to strengthen and grow greatly, and while his subconscious brain seemed endowed with a new and intense vitality. He no longer noticed the weight of his body pressing on the pillow; rather he became conscious of a tremendous new power. Hidden things became clear to him. The soul within his soul came to the surface with a flaming rush of speed. He felt himself part of nature—a direct expression of cosmic life. The currents of the earth pulsed in his veins with a puissant and mysterious rhythm.

He smoked again.

The hasheesh tasted sweet as summer rain. . . .

Another pipe.

Then sleep. Complete forgetting.

But morning came. Headache. Grey facts.

"Heaven-Born!"—el-Fosiha's whine—"there is no salt in the house, no sugar, no spices. . . ."

Grey, grey facts.

Things growing from bad to worse.

* * * *

He had never, in all his life, earned as much as a single douro. He had, all through his life, steadily wasted the little property left him by his ancestors. The latter had taken their own wherever and when-

ever they had found it. A freebooting desertman by instinct and inheritance, he would have liked to do the same, would have felt no moral scruples of any kind. But in this century, under French rule, the strong arm—unless this strong arm belonged to the invader, the Christian, the foreigner—was liable to be interpreted as felony. The strong brain was in command.

His stony orchard was worthless. His house was mortgaged from roof-top to cellar. There was hardly anything inside worth pawning or selling. Abubekr Sabri was rich, and his friend. But he would not, could not accept charity. He was a Shareef. He was of the lineage.

"I wonder," he had said to el-Fosiha a few days before, "how a man can live on nothing."

"Allah will bring help!"

"At times I doubt if Allah cares," had come the bitter reply.

* * * *

This very morning M. Jean Esterneaux, of the department of interior revenues, had called on him with all the pomp and circumstance dear to the bureaucratic French soul, garbed in silk hat and unseasonable Prince Albert, around his comfortable paunch a tricolor sash to advertise the fact that he was on an official visit.

He was a typical French colonial and intensely, aggressively, intolerantly republican. In the first-named capacity he disliked all Arabs; in the second he disliked all aristocrats. Thus he disliked Mustaffa Madani doubly since the latter was both an Arab and an aristocrat.

"Monsieur," he had said in French, sonorously,

stroking his silken, square-cut, russet beard, "your taxes are in arrear."

"I am aware of it," Mustaffa Madani had replied, also in French.

"When will you pay, *monsieur?*"

"I have not the faintest idea."

"But—it is your duty!"

Somehow, the word had flicked the Arab on the raw.

"Duty?" he had echoed, his eyes narrowing.

"Yes, *monsieur.*"

"Duty to whom—may I inquire?"

"Duty to France, *monsieur!* Duty to the republic!"

Mustaffa Madani had laughed.

"Is it my duty," he had exclaimed, "to pay a thief, a robber who breaks into my house with weapons in his hands—as the French broke into the house of Islam, the house of the Arabs? Is it the house owner's duty to pay the burglar? Is it the victim's duty to pay the assassin?"

His slow and rather cruel sense of humor had enjoyed the shocked expression on the other's face as Esterneaux had leaned forward with excited, jumbled words, his beard sticking out like a battering-ram:

"*Monsieur!*—Ah—do you realize to whom you are speaking?"

"I do indeed!"—the drawl had held the thud of a hidden, deadly insult—"to a Frenchman, a foreigner!"

"But . . ."

"To a Christian—a liar—a thief—a burglar—an assassin!"

"How dare you? God's name! How dare you?"

Esterneaux had struck the table with his clenched fist, and immediately Mustaffa Madani had stepped up to him, towering tall and broad and sinister, speaking quick, staccato, icy words:

"Leave my house!"

"Wh-what——?"

"Leave my house!"

"You—ah—you . . ." the Frenchman had spluttered, incoherently.

Then he had controlled himself. He had taken a document from his pocket and had put it on the table.

"Very well," he had continued. "We of the administration are thoroughly familiar with your arrogance, *Monsieur*. Here is the official communication warning you that unless you pay in full and within the month—two thousand francs—your property will be sold for taxes. I wish you a very good morning, *Monsieur*."

He had left, chin in the air, carrying his beard ahead of him like a triumphant flag; and now Mustaffa Madani, who understood that the other's threat had not been an empty one, was on his way to the Bazaar of the Moroccan Jews.

* * * *

He touched the little package wrapped in a foid of his burnoose. It was the last of his wife's jewels. He had intended giving it to Gouthia for a birthday present. It was a thin, exquisite chain of silver set with small diamonds and moon-stones which, according to family traditions, had been a wedding gift of his ancestor, the Moorish king of Granada, to his favorite daughter Hafsah who had married the caliph of Bagdad.

He crossed the *Mellah,* the ghetto.

It was crowded with an excited throng. For tonight at sun-down began the festival in celebration of the great red waters with which Jahveh had drowned the king Pharaoh, the oppressor of Israel.

Already, in front of the synagogue, some pious old men had assembled, mumbling the ancient psalm through toothless gums:

"Etaat terat kalla. . . . "

Already, here and there, rabbis and talmudists moved majestically through the streets, dressed in burnooses of snowy silk, preceded by musicians—violins, guitars, and drums—and followed by laughing throngs that carried tall candles and trays piled with fruit and sweet cakes.

Already, through the windows of the houses, brushed the allegretto chanting of thanksgiving to Jahveh:

"Elo Elo Yano
Elo Elo Yano
Elo Elo Yano Elo Ehad
Shoomir Ishrail. . . ."

Always yelling and chattering, never quiet, today more than ever the ghetto quivered in a symphony of sounds that surged like the slow, insistent pounding of a distant surf. Laughter. Greetings. Sharp cries of barter and haggle in a bastard mixture of languages, as the street vendors asked the Jewish women to make their last purchases before sundown for the feasting:

"Dix francs!"

"Cheap! Cheap! *Nam Yah mallma*—yes, O my mistress!"

"Hi chouffi—look, look!"

"Zoudj armat betkata—take both lots for three francs!"

"Here! *Aiaou eldjadj es Soultna*—chickens from the Sultan't chicken coop!"

"And stolen most likely!"

"Barruch abba—welcome!"

"Out of my way, fathers of dogs!" Mustaffa Madani's rough command.

He brushed through the crowds impatiently. He reached Abraham Maimonides' place.

* * * *

The latter was about to close for the day.

In the livingroom, in back of the shop, his wife had spread the table for the holiday feast. A rich, savory odor drifted through.

"You are late, Sidi," he said. "This is a holiday. Perhaps you will come back tomorrow. . . . "

"No. Today."

"Very well. What is it?"

"This!" Mustaffa Madani put the necklace on the counter. "How much for this, Jew?"

"How much do you want, Sidi?"

"Two thousand francs." It was characteristic of Mustaffa Madani's Shareefian simplicity in business affairs that he demanded the price of his taxes; not a centime more.

"Two thousand francs—a lot of money. . . . Hmhm. . . . " Maimonides picked up the bauble, examined it; smiled.

"Well?" demanded the other.

"The silver is worthless, Sidi!"

"The stones, Jew! The exquisite workmanship!"

"Who cares for workmanship these days, Sidi? Value is what they want—value in gold—value of

buy and sell . . . and—look!—what value is there in this? The diamonds are splinters. And as for moon-stones—I ask you—who wants moon-stones? It would be a *misvah,* a generous deed, if I gave you thirty francs."

"Did you say—thirty. . . . ?" Mustaffa Madani did not believe his ears.

"Yes."

"But. . . . "

"Thirty-five, Sidi! Why haggle on a feast day?"

"I—I thought——" the Arab was utterly taken aback—"ah—two thousand francs. . . . "

"Why not a million? Sidi!" Abraham Maimonides exclaimed with something akin to pity, and he was speaking the truth. "I shall give you sixty francs—and then I am losing—by my wife's honor!"

"Curse you and your wife! Look, Jew. This jewel was worn by a princess of Granada a thousand years ago—when your ancestors were littering pigs."

"A live pig is worth money, Sidi, and what worth is there to a dead princess—of Granada—or even of Jerusalem the Golden? Sixty francs—and I am losing money—it is the truth—may I be father to my sons!"

Suddenly Mustaffa Madani understood that the man was not lying. As suddenly the realization came to him of what it meant. He had nothing left to sell; had been living from hand to mouth these many years; had reached the end of his rope as people must. The French would make good their threat. They would sell his house. They would throw him into the street. Him and Gouthia. He was more bewildered than despairing. He kept clutching at his

head as though trying to pluck out the black thoughts that hurt his brain.

"Allah!"

It was a broken, shivering sob, torn from the very roots of his soul.

Maimonides looked up.

He saw the other's face, livid, ghastly, ravaged. He read in every line a terrible deterioration, a spirit all at once near the breaking point.

"Listen, Sidi . . . " he said.

He was about to offer advice, sympathy. After all, this was a feast day, and he was rich and happy and healthy.

"Listen . . . "

But already the Arab had picked up the necklace and was turning to the door. He lurched like a drunken man. He stumbled; nearly fell.

His house, he thought, his daughter—and only until the end of the month to raise the money.

And there was nothing else left to sell—nothing—nothing. . . .

And what was he going to do. . . . ?

He walked out, like a man in a daze.

"Sidi!" Maimonides called after him. "I shall give you a hundred francs. . . . "

There was no answer. He shrugged his shoulders. He closed the shop and entered the livingroom.

"Rebecca-my-gold," he said to his plump, pretty wife, "it is as I told you. That Moslem is like an ebony tree back home in Morocco. He cannot bend. But he is brittle and hollow—and very soon now a storm will come and break him to pieces."

"Well, Abraham, let us give thanks to the God of Israel that you are not like him."

"You are right, Rebecca-my-star. Charming you are and beautiful as the flowers of the Talmud, and —" sniffing the rich, savory odors—"what a cook!"

He washed his hands, put about his shoulders the *tallit*, the silken prayer shawl, and lifted the glass of sacerdotal wine to his lips.

"Yoom ashishi mokray Kadish—" he sing-songed the ancient Hebrew incantation.

"Yoom ashishi mokray Kadish—" came the triumphant echo from a thousand windows in the ghetto as, dazed, stumbling, Mustaffa Madani walked down the streets.

* * * *

He walked aimlessly. He walked for hours. He did not know where he was going, nor why.

Night came. Rain fell. Rain stopped.

He did not notice. He did not think. He did not feel.

Then a ribald song, belched almost into his ear, startled him.

He recognized it:

"If you want breasts,
White breasts,
Come to the house,
The house of Fathma Ullal. . . ."

The singer, a drunken Arab sailor, lurched on.

"If you want breasts,
White breasts. . . ."

came his hiccough as he turned the corner.

Mustaffa Madani looked up; looked about him.

The street of vice. The street of lust. The doors that never closed. The brutish, sidewise flare of

petrol lamps showing narrow rooms, French mirror wardrobes.

Men in there, sinning their puny, bestial, turgid sins. Women of a dozen races, enormously ironic in the impersonality of their embraces.

Lips greedy for kisses. Hands greedy for money. Sour breaths. Stagnant eyes.

A woman came from a house.

She spoke to him, in broken Arabic:

"Come, Sidi. Come with me. . . . "

He looked at her.

She was evidently a European, perhaps an Englishwoman, still attractive with her honey colored hair, her oval face, her vividly red lips. But there was a haunting fear in her violet eyes, and, somehow, Mustaffa Madani pitied her and changed his harsh reply into soft words:

"No, my child . . . no, no. . . . "

"Please!" She clutched his arm. "Look! I am pretty."

"You are. But. . . . "

"Why not—then. . . ?"

"I have not the money."

"Give me—this . . . the thing in your hand. . . . "

She pointed. He looked. His fingers were about the silver necklace. He had forgotten it; had not put it back into his burnoose . . . the necklace which had been a wedding gift of his ancestor, the Moorish king of Granada, to his favorite daughter Hafsah who had married the caliph of Bagdad.

"Come!" the woman insisted. "Give it to me—and I will. . . . "

"Ho!" He interrupted her, with huge, side-splitting, unhuman laughter. "Here—here!"

He thrust the jewel into her hands. He followed her into the house.

* * * *

On the afternoon of the same day the meeting between Gouthia and Hassan was an accident, a pure matter of coincidence, though often in after years Hassan, with his Islamic philosophy, interpreted it as an especial sending of Fate.

Heretofore he had never seen Gouthia alone. El-Fosiha was always in the room, dozing half the time, but a living reminder that this was the Orient, the land where decent women are veiled, and where nothing is private, not even grief or love.

But that afternoon, with spring crying them out into the open, Gouthia and el-Fosiha had gone for a walk to the old Moslem cemetery at the edge of the desert. It was quiet and peaceful here among the tombstones that dreamed of Judgment Day. The sun was dipping low into gold and amber and crushed rose pink behind the rolling sand dunes that stretched to the south, carpeting the floor of the world for hundreds of miles toward the Sahara and Timbuktoo.

A caravan trail cut through. But it was deserted. Only occasionally a bit of desert flotsam would spring up over the brink of a rise and drift past: a Bedawin herder driving his flock of goats on its northern migration to summer pasturage; an old woman trudging to some nomad's camp, panting under a huge fagot of brushwood; a camel rider ambling along with a faint jingling of bells.

"Ah . . . " el-Fosiha sighed contentedly and squatted on her heels.

She was grateful to the sun. It warmed her old

bones. She welcomed the peace of the sands where all the sounds and all the movements of the earth seemed to have passed out of existence, where their very memory seemed to have died; and presently she fell asleep, still squatting on her heels, her mouth half open, her head rocking from side to side.

* * * *

Gouthia stared into the distance.

She had always loved the desert; her own desert; her Arab birthright to the stretch of yellow loam, the flanking and heaving of fantastic chalk rocks piled up as if by a giant's playful hands, the sudden, vast clefts and hollows widening into inky caves, the sand dunes stabbing with endless, golden gestures, and farther in the distance, where the hills tumbled their stony avalanche, the twilight of iridescent color amid the purple shadows. Above it all a sky of polished steel with a huge blaze of light—lonely, hot, dry—and free.

Free!

That was the breath of it, the rhythm, the secret.

But today she felt no elation in the desert's freedom. Freedom? Why—it was only an empty, meaningless word, a pale mockery.

She was not free. She was a slave to the conventions and prejudices of Islam, tied to them hand and foot; and so she sat there, staring into the distance, while tangled dreams and desires ran to and fro over the surface of her soul.

* * * *

Finally she shrugged her shoulders.

She cut off her dreams in mid-air. They would never come true.

"*Mektoob*—it is so written!" she said.

It is so written. The blight of Islam. The blight of her own young life.

It was fatality.

Fatality sneered at her from the face of the desert. It dropped with the sun's crackling rays as leaves drop in a dying forest.

"Mektoob!" she repeated, with an accent of finality.

* * * *

She rose. She looked at el-Fosiha who was sleeping peacefully. She did not want to waken her. But she was nervous. She was not able to sit still. So she walked away a few steps; further away. She dropped her face veil. There was nobody here to see her; and she liked to feel the hot Saharan wind on her cheeks.

The desert was all about her, coiling the spell of its molten, golden gyves; huge, unfathomable, sterile; yet, somehow, charged to the brim with life—life watching, waiting, hiding behind the yellow, shifting ramparts of apparent desolation. The sand dunes moved like the tides of the sea. They seemed drawn on, urged on by piled-up cycles of cosmic energy. They swirled south and away, dipping beyond the horizon, into the spawning eternities of time and space and God's will.

Gouthia walked on. An indescribable loneliness was in her heart.

And then, turning the corner of a great, wind flayed rock, she heard the soft whinny of a horse, and a moment later saw Hassan sitting in the shade of the rock, his hands idly moving the pages of a book.

* * * *

He looked up.

Her first impulse was to draw the veil across her face. Her second impulse was to leave it.

And be it remembered that never, since she had reached the age of puberty, had any man except her father seen her face below the eyes. Be it remembered, furthermore, that the face veil means more to Oriental womanhood than a mere bit of wearing apparel; that while having become a symbol of a burden and even, in a way, of subjection, it has also in the course of time grown to be a symbol of chastity and purity. It would be an exaggeration to say that her reactions, her emotions, her physical and mental sensations as well as her physical and mental inhibitions were those of a young American or English girl, a virgin, who suddenly finds herself naked before the man whom she loves—the man, moreover, who has never spoken to her of love. Yet there was somewhat of a parallel between the two cases.

Even so, for a reason which she did not, could not analyze, she obeyed her second instinct.

She did not draw up her veil. She stared at Hassan proudly, almost challengingly. She did not even blush. Nor did she speak.

She just stood there, head erect, eyes leveled straight, motionless but for the slight flutter of her narrow hands, the heaving of her breasts, the nervous quiver of her nostrils.

* * * *

Hassan dropped his eyes. Typically, it was the man, not the woman, who was ashamed.

Then he opened his eyes, wide, almost greedily.

He beheld the sweetness and glory of her face.

He let the book slide to the ground. Very slowly, as though drawn by a magnet, he rose.

He was conscious of a hard tightening and bunching of his muscles. He was aware of warring impulses within himself.

He wanted to rush up to Gouthia, to take her in his arms, to carry her away struggling but captured. He wanted to crush her beneath him, to overwhelm her with a sheer animal brutality of passion. And at the same time he wanted to throw himself at her feet, to embrace her knees, to implore her humbly—O, so humbly!—like a slave, to give to him her love, a tithe of her love; or if she could not, would not, to forgive him the greatness and impatience of his own love.

Thoughts passing in the fraction of a second. Lasting an eternity.

Confused, tangled thoughts.

Thoughts that swept him from his known moorings.

Body and spirit. Desire of the flesh; exultation of the spirit.

Too, an enormous gesture of life, of nature, of conceiving, creating. A sensing of elemental significance thrust into his consciousness. The silent syllables of a new language.

Sex impulse and religious impulse, mingling queerly in his brain.

Memories of the whirling, rhythmic dance in the dervish *tekké*.

The Koran. Islam. So natural. So human. So inevitable. . . .

* * * *

For the Merciful hath taught the Koran.
He created the male and the female.
He taught them clear speech.
He taught them desire and fulfillment,
An echo of His own creation.
The sun and the moon in their courses
And the planets and the trees do homage to Him.
And the Heaven, He raised it, and appointed the balance.
And the Earth, He prepared it for living things.
Therein He created fruit, and the palm with sheaths,
And grain with its husk, and the fragrant herb;
Then which of the Lord's bounties would ye twain deny?
He created Man of clay like a pot.
He created Woman out of a crooked rib of Man.
Man He created for Woman, and Woman for Man:
Then which of the Lord's bounties would ye twain deny?
Lord of the two Easts,
And Lord of the two Wests,
And Lord of the female principle and the male:
Then which of the Lord's bounties would ye twain deny?
He has let loose the seven seas which meet together,
And His are the ships towering on the sea like mountains.
All things in the Heaven and Earth supplicate Him:
Then which of the Lord's bounties would ye twain deny?
Paradise He created for the True Believers,
And therein two flowing wells,
And therein of every fruit two kinds,
And therein the shy-eyed maidens,

Whom neither Man nor Djinn hath touched before:
Then which of the Lord's bounties would ye twain deny?
Blessed be the name of the Lord God,
King of the seven worlds:
Then which of the Lord's bounties would ye . . .

* * * *

He came a little nearer. So did she. Neither spoke. Their eyes met; held each other.

"No, no!" she said to herself as she felt an eerie, disquieting sensation perplexing her with a passionate reeling of life's foundations as she had known them.

She tried to subjugate her senses to the cool, authoritative command of her brain:

"No, no . . . "

She saw the question in his eyes. She read it. And something flashed from his eyes to the very roots of her soul, causing her heart to pulse and sing in a triumph of delirious exultation.

The frontiers of her being changed subtly. They melted. They reached out across her past life and the drab realities of her past life; out across time and space; opening—opening wide—to include him.

Opening like a flower, to receive his manhood. Feeling it open. Feeling it in her mind, her imagining. Feeling it in her blood, her body, her flesh. Opening like flower petals to soft, warm summer rain. Feeling the warm moisture of it.

Thoughts dropped away from her.

* * * *

Nor were there now thoughts in his brain—thoughts that she was of the Shareefs while he was

a Bedawin, a dervish, a nobody in race and clan, ugly and small and puny.

At this moment he was the man, and she the woman. . . .

* * * *

"Once in the life of each man—sayeth the Koran—comes to him his chance for happiness or woe. Once. And only once. And while all else is written from beginning in the book of each man's life by the Angel of the Scrolls—sayeth the Koran—there is left one page whereon each is permitted to trace, himself, the record of his choice. . . . "

* * * *

His choice.

And then, as if a gigantic, nameless driving power were pushing him on, he found himself advancing toward her, his heart beating brokenly against his ribs, a flame cutting through him that left him without cerebral actions or reactions of any sort.

She stood without moving, her eyes starry, her lips parted. Expectant she seemed; triumphant; and yet a little frightened.

He felt her close to him. He felt the magic of her beauty, her perfume, her touch, with the blurred indistinctness of overwhelming desire; yet felt it not *as* a desire; felt it as a necessity, a truth.

His arms were about her. He spoke no word. Nor did she.

He saw her face close to his. He saw her eyes—soft, darkening, almost like those of an animal—look at him through half closed lids.

He felt her lips yield to his, and he turned giddy with the joy and mystery of it, the discovery of it. His being closed about her like a wall. There was

no outside world. There was no desert, no sky, no sun. There was only she and he. Only a woman and a man. And there was God.

Sweet it seemed to him, and poignant and tremendously vital, and just a little tragic, as the sea is tragic and the depth of the forest at noon and the hiving of far stars. He felt the mighty strings of life within himself, set a-quiver as by the forces of the earth, pouring through his body and soul with huge vibrations. It was more than passion—that blending of flesh and temperament and imagining. It was—between this man and this woman—a dual affirming of truth, truth of nature, truth of action. He knew the nearness of Allah in this gesture, this vast evocation, as he had never known it in his mysterious, whirling dervish ritual, back yonder in the *tekké* of the Molawees.

Her right hand was in his left. She heard the humming of his blood in her own veins with a steady reverberation, a powerful rhythm and measure. His fingers moved a little, curled inside her hand, caressed her palm. A shiver ran through her like a network, immensely delicate and immensely strong, of a million feathery touches; and there was in her subconscious mind something like a sudden shifting of values, ethical, moral.

A melting and crumbling of barriers. Two human forces leaping forth to mingle and make one. The primitive. The ultimate.

And all this in the tiny space—as men count time —of five minutes, perhaps less. Yet it seemed an eternity before he heard his own voice, husky staccato:

"I love you—I love you so. . . . "

"And I love you. . . . "

She hesitated; slurred; stopped. Then she continued with utter seriousness, with an utter abandon of her personality, her pride:

"O my lord!"

She kissed him.

"Why do you love me?" she asked.

He held her close. All his impetuous Arab blood was in his words—lyric words, as they come to the race of Shem in moments of great emotion:

"I love you because you are the budding of leaves in spring. I love you because you are the stir and rustle of the warm south wind. I love you because your hair is scented like ruddy harvest time. I love you because my heart has plunged into the darkness of your eyes and drowned therein. I love you because I know the touch of your hands in my dreams. I love you because you are the whisper of the unseen worlds, the breeze of the unknown shores, the gold of the unknown stars. . . . "

He buried his face in the curling hair about her neck.

"And you—" he asked—"why do you love me?"

"Oh—" she smiled—"just because, heart of my heart! And—Hassan . . . "

"Yes——?"

"When did you first love me?"

"When I saw you first."

"Impossible."

"Why, Gouthia?"

"You did not know me then."

"I knew you enough to love you. And you, Gouthia, when did you first love me?"

"I have always loved you—in this life—and in former lives. There was never beginning to my love for you, O my lord, as there will never be an end. . . . "

"How much do you love me, Gouthia?"

"Oh—how can I tell? More than my life, my soul, my faith in the Prophet—on Him the salute! And you—how much do you love me?"

"My love is greater than yours!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

"Don't let's quarrel!"

They both laughed.

"How can I ever live without you?"

"You will not have to, dear. . . ."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure!"

Then, suddenly, a high, reedy voice interrupted the lovers; drove them apart:

"Gouthia! Gouthia!"

"El-Fosiha—" whispered the girl. "She is awake —and looking for me."

She turned to go. She pushed Hassan back as he was about to accompany her.

"No," she said. "Don't let her see you."

"Gouthia! Gouthia! Where are you, child?" came the negress' anxious call.

"She is old-fashioned," Gouthia continued rapidly.

'If she should guess that you and I . . . Oh . . . She would tell my father . . . "

And, with the word, she grew pale, frightened; she remembered.

"My father—" she stammered—"what will he——"

"I shall talk to him tomorrow morning."

"But he—he is . . ."

Hassan looked at her with his deep, resolute eyes.

"I am not afraid," he said.

She echoed the words with profound conviction:

"Not afraid! Of course not! I know!"

* * * *

She kissed him. She disappeared around the corner of the chalk rock, ran up to el-Fosiha just as the latter was calling again:

"Gouthia! Gouthia!"

"Here I am, nurse."

"Where have you been?"

"Just walking."

"But—alone——?"

"I did not want to disturb you."

"What happened to your veil, child?"

"I took it off—to feel the warm desert wind on my cheek."

The old negress was shocked. A convert to Islam, typically, she was rigid and narrow in her views.

"Suppose somebody had seen you!" she exclaimed. "What dishonor! Allah! What disgrace!"

"Who could have seen me? It is lonely in the desert."

"I thought I heard voices, Gouthia. I thought I heard you talking. . . . "

"I was!" Gouthia replied, mischievously.

"Oh—to whom?"

"To myself—and to . . ."

"Well—?" suspiciously.

"To the little djinns of the desert—to the little dancing yellow sand sprites." The girl laughed. "And—nurse——?"

"Aha——?"

"The little sand sprites told me they loved me—told me I was beautiful and soft and desirable. . . . "

"Hm—" grumbled el-Fosiha. "Perhaps you are. But your father is a man of short temper and impatient intestines. He will call me a black ape and, belike, make me eat stick if dinner is not on the table to await his arrival. Look. It is late."

She pointed west where the sun was sinking below the horizon, reddening the desert to deep russet, then chilling it to flat, silvery white, while the houses of el-Korma were misted in golden gauze.

"Allah!" wailed the negress. "It will take us over an hour and a half to walk home. Why did you not call me, child? Allah! But the master will be impatient!"

* * * *

El-Fosiha was right.

Mustaffa Madani was already on the roof-top when, after a quick scurrying about the kitchen, she came up with steaming platters.

He had only remained a short while with the Englishwoman. Quick, brutal passion. The memory sickened him. The woman's mouth, like a moist, crimson gash. Her lolling, supine body, like a great white slug. Her pathetic attempts at love making. The scent of cheap perfume.

He shivered with disgust; turned to el-Fosiha with curt words:

"What manners be these, O mother of seventeen times seventeen piglings, to keep me waiting?"

"Gouthia and I went for a walk. The streets were so crowded. Then the rice burned—"she invented glibly—"I had to boil more."

"Wah!" came his sharp retort. "Excuses, like honey, are on the lips of the liar."

He finished his meal rapidly.

"Another cup of coffee?" asked el-Fosiha.

"No."

"A glass of sherbet?"

"No."

"A pipe, Heaven-Born?"

"No, no, no!"

* * * *

He looked at his daughter. She looked at him.

Father and daughter had passed tonight through a similar experience. Passion.

He was ashamed of his memory. She exulted in her memory, but was afraid.

He wondered if by word or gesture of his or intuition of hers she could guess what had happened to him. She wondered if by word or gesture of hers or intuition of his he could guess what had happened to her.

They spoke, almost simultaneously, instinctively, not knowing what they were going to say:

"Father . . ."

"Daughter . . . "

They discontinued their sentences and were silent, both too occupied with their own thoughts to ask the other what he or she had meant to say.

* * * *

It was a curious situation; a curious relation.

They loved each other very deeply. Her love for him was warm and girlish, tinged with admiration and hero worship. His love for her was like autumn rain, the kind which one does not see, but which one feels, unceasing, penetrating, slightly chilling.

There was in his brain the brooding, black memory of the day's events; the French tax collector's threat, the fruitless visit to Abraham Maimonides' shop, the ultimate danger to Gouthia and himself. He had meant to tell her. Perhaps, as never before, his harsh, unyielding soul craved for consolation and support; felt the stark solitude that, all these years, had crept upon him and had let his brain feed unhindered on its own delusions. Yet, finally, he decided that he would not. He would not worry her young soul until the last moment, until the catastrophe was imminent. She could not help him; and something might turn up to get him out of the mire.

Her thoughts ran in a parallel groove. When Hassan had told her that he was not afraid she had believed him implicitly. She still believed him. But she knew her father, and she wondered if it would be wise to prepare him for her lover's visit. But she, too, decided that she would not worry him. The morrow would be here soon enough. Only, thinking of what might happen then and fearing it, for the first time in her life she put considerations of herself, her own life and future and happiness, above the love for her father. Not that her love for him lessened. It was as strong and great as ever. It was simply relegated to a secondary place. Nor had she become selfish. Selfishness means a narrowing scale of life's values; and her scale had broadened, had expanded to include nature, conception, creation, womanhood.

But at that moment, with all these subconscious thoughts coiling and recoiling in her brain, suddenly, her face took on an expression of obstinacy, almost of hardness, that brought out a striking resemblance between father and child.

El-Fosiha felt it. It disturbed her vaguely. She did not know what to make of it.

It was quite still on the roof-top.

Mustaffa sighed.

As often in the past, when confronted by the present's bitter problems, he spoke all at once of former days, complainingly, regrettingly; spoke of the change that had come to those of Shareefian lineage:

"The burden of our ancient race is hard to bear. . . ."

El-Fosiha raised pious hands to the fire veined vaulting of the evening sky.

"The Lord God is everywhere!" she said with weak consolation.

"Do you indeed think so?" he countered ironically.

"Yes."

"Hm——" He shrugged his shoulders, rose, and turned to go. "I am tired. Good night!"

"Good night, father!"

"Good night, Heaven-Born!"

He left, and for a long time the two women sat on the roof-top without speaking.

* * * *

The streets were deserted. Night had dropped quickly. It lay over el-Korma with a brocaded mantle of purple and silver. It dimmed the roof tops to delicate grey. It twinkled with a lone, nostalgic spot of gold on the minaret of the Mosque of

the Five Swords. The houses and bazaar booths were shuttered until the morning.

Not a blind quivered. Not a glimmer stabbed through the wooden gratings. There was not a sound.

Life seemed hidden away secretly; barred behind the veil of Islam. There was not even a rag of wind, fluttering, sighing.

* * * *

The stillness weighed on el-Fosiha's nerves. She looked at Gouthia who was staring into the distance with dreamy eyes. She coughed. But the girl paid no attention.

El-Fosiha smiled.

She knew an unfailing way of awaking Gouthia's interest.

"Gouthia!" she called.

"Yes—?" listlessly.

"Did I ever tell you of the Ashanti warrior, the crusher of stones, the killer of lions, down in the south, who loved me? *Hayah, hayah!*—but our love was sweet! *Hayah!*—but our love was strong. . . ."

Gouthia's high, clear laugh cut through the negress' words like the edge of a sword.

"Allah!" she exclaimed. "And what do *you* know of love?"

Again she laughed, loudly, triumphantly, as she thought of the morning and her lover's coming.

Again silence.

Night was everywhere, black, strong. Across the heaven the stars trailed golden patterns. A bird came from nowhere with a whirring of wings, then vanished into an eddy of wind. The wind increased. The palm trees creaked.

Gouthia's voice. Suddenly:

"Nurse?"

"Yes?"

"Tell me. . . . "

"What?"

"You—you have had children——?"

"I? Children? Yes!" She opened the gates of remembrance, "Many children—" proudly—"as many as there are hairs on your head! I was never one of your barren, useless, dried-up women! Seven children—eight—not counting the twins I bore your father—they died when they were quite young! Give me a strong lover—" she laughed—"better two—and I could people the Sahara! Why . . . "

"Nurse!" interrupted the girl. "To bear a child—it hurts——?"

"The pain is sweet—if you love." Again el-Fosiha laughed. "Perhaps you yourself—some day . . . "

"May Allah grant it!"

* * * *

She did not sleep that night.

Morning came with elfin lights and rose red shadows. It came with the teeming of streets and bazaars and, from the minaret of the Mosque of the Five Swords, with the muezzin's call to the first prayer of the day:

"Yah abyd Illah, la ilah ill' Ullah, wahed Ullah—O ye worshipers of the Lord, there is no God but the Lord! One the God is!"

"One the God is!" the passionate refrain of the True Believers.

"One the God is!" echoed Gouthia.

And, incoherently, raising clasped hands:

"Help me—help me—O Merciful . . . "

She sank on her knees. She touched the ground with her forehead.

Deep prayer in her soul. . . .

* * * *

All that is in the Heaven and on Earth
Magnifieth the Lord:
He is the Mighty, the Wise, the Merciful!"
He giveth life, and giveth death,
And He is powerful over all things:
He is the Mighty, the Wise, the Merciful!"
He is the first, and the last.
He is the seen, and the unseen.
All things doth He know:
He is the Mighty, the Wise, the Merciful!
It is He who created the Heaven and the Earth in six days,
Then ascended the Throne.
He knoweth what goeth into the earth,
And what cometh out of it,
And what cometh down from the sky,
And what riseth up into it.
And He is with you, wherever ye go,
And He seeth what ye do:
He is the Mighty, the Wise, the Merciful!
To Him all things return.
He maketh the night to follow the day,
And he maketh the day to follow the night,
And he knoweth the secrets of the breasts:
He is the Mighty, the Wise, the Merciful. . . .

* * * *

A thud of the knocker on the outer gate.

Gouthia ran to the latticed balcony and looked out. Down below was Hassan.

"You are early for the lesson," said el-Fosiha, opening the gate.

"I am not here for the lesson. I would like to speak to the Sidi."

"He made an appointment with you?"

"No."

"Then I do not think that he will. . . . "

"It is very important, el-Fosiha."

"But . . . "

"Please!"

"I shall ask him. Wait."

* * * *

She closed the door.

Hassan waited on the threshold, and Gouthia whistled softly. He looked up. He saw her narrow hand fluttering through the lattice, with a slight, silent message of trust and hope and faith.

He smiled.

Low and clear, his words drifted to her ears:

"I love you. . . . "

Again the hand fluttered. It withdrew. It reappeared a few moments later and dropped a crimson damask rose. He picked it up and pressed it to his lips.

It was all very simple. It was all very trite and usual and commonplace. But to these two it seemed that it had never happened before, not to anyone in all the world; that nobody had ever loved as they loved.

He said so, cupping his lips with his hands:

"There was never love like mine!"

"Except mine!"

She opened the lattice a little. She showed him her unveiled face for the fleeting fraction of a

second. Then, quickly, she closed the lattice as a street vendor came swinging around the corner with his raucous shout:

"Here are vegetables! Eggplants! Gourds! Cheap! Cheap here!"

Other street vendors. Rushing. Shouting.

"Trade with me, O Moslems. I am the father and mother of all cut-rates!"

"Salty and savory! Salty and savory!"

"Mint! Mint here!"

The puling Semitic symphony.

Barter and trade.

Day had begun. . . .

* * * *

Inside, el-Fosiha salaamed before Mustaffa Madani and announced the young dervish's visit.

"What does he want?" asked Mustaffa Madani.

"I do not know."

"Tell him I do not wish to see him."

"He says it is very important."

"Oh——?"

Mustaffa Madani's eyes were blood-shot. His hands were shaky. He felt as if somebody had plucked out his nerves one by one and had stuffed them back again in the wrong places.

Like his daughter, he had not slept the night before. Nor, in spite of the temptation, in spite of the agony of his tortured nerves, had he sought the consolation of the hasheesh pipe.

Deliberately, cold-bloodedly, he had gone over his life and had drawn the sum total: failure.

Not for one moment had he blamed himself. He had blamed the world at large, almost convinced that the rest of mankind, not only the French, but all

Christians, all Jews, even his fellow Moslems, had formed a conspiracy to pull him down to their own ignoble level. He was beginning to feel that he could bear it no longer. It was becoming a pathological obsession.

It was not only the grinding poverty, the imminent danger of being thrown into the street with his daughter, like beggars, homeless, penniless. It was not that the future looked even blacker than the present. These were material considerations. He would carry through somehow.

What really lacerated his soul was the fact that he must suffer equality, the patronage, of the very people whom he had always despised: the French, the Jews, the Moslems of low degree; the Greeks and Armenians who were gradually drifting into the land, like vultures to the reek of carrion, mostly as middlemen and usuring money lenders, parasites all, taking as security the cow and the unborn calf, relying on their shifty, crooked cleverness and on the fact of being Christians and usually, by devious ways, British subjects or American citizens, to outrage every code, legal or moral and to set up a howl, that reverberated through every chancellery and foreign mission board and newspaper in Europe and America when a Moslem, driven to despair, unable to obtain justice in a court presided over by Christians, finally took the law into his own hand—the ancient law—the sword.

All this. The shame and humility of it. Weighing on Mustaffa Madani's mind.

But what hurt him most was that, instead of laughing at their pretensions and presumptions as he used

to, he was actually commencing to subscribe to them himself.

He remembered yesterday afternoon when he had gone to the bazaar of the Moroccan Jews.

He had been on the very point—had caught himself just in the nick of time—of pleading with Abraham Maimonides, of imploring him for more money, of giving him the pity and the pain of his sordid confidence.

He felt the harassing doubt that the first bulwark of his citadel—the barrier of his reticent, sardonic haughtiness, the barrier of his Shareefian principles—was being unhinged, was about to crash and splinter, to tumble about his ears. And so, all last night, he had kept awake trying to repair the breach in his defences—with thoughts, with vain imaginings, with self-assurance, since he had no other tools—trying to keep intact that magnificent and idiotic talisman of pride which had ruined his life.

And here, like a challenge, came this young dervish, this upstart, this Bedawin, this desert rat, this nobody, who "would like to see him on important business."

As if they were equals!

As if they had broken bread and tasted salt together!

* * * *

A harsh refusal was on his tongue.

Then he reconsidered.

Perhaps the man was here with a message from his master, the sheykh Abubekr Sabri.

"I shall see him," he said briefly. "Show him in."

"Listen is obey, Heaven-Born!"

A few minutes later el-Fosiha ushered in the visitor and withdrew.

* * * *

Hassan salaamed deeply.

"Teranee b'illah, yah Sidi, wah baq ana dakhilaq —" he said ceremoniously, decently—"by the Lord you see me, and I enter, sir, under your protection."

"The salute!" came Mustaffa Madani's short greeting.

He neither offered the other his hand, nor did he ask him to sit down.

"And you want—what?" he asked.

Hassan felt nervous. He was not strong in body, and he was aware of it. Nor was he exactly a brave man. Of this, too, he was aware. Of both he was ashamed. And so, to overcome, rather to counteract, the double failing, and unable to arm himself with bodily strength he had deliberately, in self-protection, cultivated certain disarming characteristics, had forced himself to acquire an earnest self-mastery, to acquire the virtues of patience and good-humor and tolerance. He had furthermore the inherited sense of dignity bequeathed to him by many generations of Bedawin ancestors.

With the help of these qualities, he had prepared beforehand what he was going to say to Mustaffa Madani, word for word. He had even endeavored to imagine the other's replies, his protest and fury, and his own probable counter-arguments.

Now, face to face with him, he was losing all his serenity. The carefully memorized speech slipped from his mind as sand slips through fingers. He caught himself blushing; hated himself for it.

He tried to speak out straight and manly and to the point—and could not.

"I—" he stammered— "I do not suppose you know why I am here, Sidi——?"

"A message from the sheykh, eh?"

"No, Sidi."

"No——?" Mustaffa Madani raised his eyebrows. "What then——?"

"I am here. . . . "

"Well—why?"

"I am here—oh——" Hassan felt more and more nervous; became more and more conscious of the fear in his heart—"I am here—on a personal matter. . . . "

"Personal matter—between you and me, O creature?"

"Yes, Sidi."

"There can be nothing personal between you and me," was the chilly retort, "unless—" with bitter irony—"you are one of my creditors—one of the many to whom I owe money. If you are, help yourself to my house, my beard, and the mice in the bin. But—" pointing at the door—"leave me alone!"

"Sidi—Sidi—please——" Hassan made another effort to speak with force and cogency. But he was not successful. His voice shook. "I must—by the Prophet—by Allah and all the true Saints. . . . "

"Do not quote the Koran to the buffalo about to gore you!" came Mustaffa Madani's grim jest. "Go!"

Hassan salaamed.

"Sidi!" he implored. "Listen to me!"

And, in the home-span parlance of the desert, as one asking for hospitality and protection, salaaming deeply with outstretched hands, he added:

"Behold, my lord! I have alighted at your tent!"

"And my tent, being mine own tent, refuses your feet and your face," came the reply. "Go away at once. The interview is ended."

"Please . . . "

"The interview is ended!"—Mustaffa Madani's voice rose a sudden, minatory octave.

* * * *

Again the younger man blushed.

His lips quivered. His throat felt parched. He noticed that his left hand was trembling violently.

He was afraid; physically afraid.

His mind leaped to the sordid knowledge of it; and, paradoxically, it helped him to regain a little of his patiently acquired self-possession.

His senses were numbled. But his voice was now quite steady:

"Forgive me, Sidi. But I shall not leave this room until you have heard me and answered me."

Mustaffa Madani was an obstinate man, of a headstrong tendency to jump the fences of his own making; and, in spite of it or because of it, it infuriated him to see the same quality in others.

He had been sitting with his back to the window, his face in the shadows. Now he moved forward a little. By a sidewise twist, his face came into the bright rays of the sun. Hard, tough-grained, Gothic, it stared at Hassan with a certain unhuman ferocity; sinister; almost depraved.

Hassan felt like turning and running away. But he did not.

The reasons for his obstinacy were peculiar and illogical. For, just then, his love for Gouthia which

had brought him here and kept him here, was paralleled by a queer curiosity. He wanted to see what would happen. A detached portion of his brain watched the scene, watched himself, with a keen, slightly ironic interest.

He heard his own words, speaking with an agitated abruptness:

"No! I will not leave this room—this house—not until . . . "

"Allah!" exclaimed Mustaffa Madani.

Then, suddenly, the sight of the young dervish, so puny compared to himself, his pathetic and footling stubbornness, caused his mirth to rise in uncontrollable waves.

His lips began to twitch.

Finally he laughed loudly and frankly.

"Very well," he said. "Tell me if you must. If I do not listen to you I am afraid that you may lose your temper and smite this hoary old pate. I submit to Fate. Tell me, Sir Ink-Grinder."

Hassan winced beneath the blighting ridicule. Yet it was this same ridicule which stiffened his fibre and made him speak, straight out.

"Sidi!" He took a step forward. His face was the color of ashes. But his voice was clear. "I have the honor to ask of you the hand and the body of your daughter Gouthia in marriage."

Mustaffa Madani looked up. He wrinkled his forehead. He was honestly puzzled; honestly doubted his ears.

"You—ah——?" he asked. "I heard right——?"

Hassan's lips drew into a thin line. His eyes were wide and resolute. Now that he had spoken the

crucial words and could not take them back even had he wished to, he was fearless.

"Yes, Sidi," he said simply.

* * * *

Mustaffa Madani did not speak. He could not. His lips were unable to form words. In a back cell of his brain, incredulity glanced, squint-eyed, at ferocity. Presently the two would mingle.

He rose very slowly.

His eyes narrowed into slits. His jaws clamped. The veins on his temples stood out like ropes. His brain seemed dry and crimson.

Again he tried to speak—something; anything; a curse; a foul insult. Again his lips could not form and utter the words.

He made another step forward.

His jaws were clamped no longer, nor were his eyes like slits. His jaws were loose, sagging; his eyes wide and round and glassy.

His great, hairy hands opened and shut convulsively. His whole massive frame—now that incredulity and ferocity had mingled—hungered for a concrete and brutal realization of the hate that was twisting his soul.

He advanced slowly, his face like that of a corpse, exuding an atmosphere that was less frightening than indecent in its bestial nakedness—obscene—prurient.

Still he advanced, slowly, while the other stood his ground, continuing to speak in that same clear voice:

"I am not of the lineage. I know it. I am a nobody by race, a dervish, a Bedawin, a poor man. But I

love your daughter. I shall make her happy. I love her—and she loves me. . . . "

* * * *

Hassan's last words released the catch in Mustaffa Madani's brain.

That Hassan should love his daughter—yes—it was possible. Even that Hassan should speak of it. An arrogance. Decidedly. But a sign of the times.

But that Gouthia should return the man's love—unless Hassan lied, and it was clear to him that he did not lie—why . . . thoughts and imaginings poured blindingly upon him. . . .

Hassan must have spoken to Gouthia alone. . . .

Must have spoken to her of love, and she to him . . . perhaps kissed her . . . perhaps. . . .

His brain threw out the thought; caught it again, on the threshold; jerked it back; played with it. . . .

Perhaps his lineage was already dishonored—besmirched . . . and . . .

"Allah!" The single cry came from his lips. High. Broken. Almost squeaky. Grotesque. Ludicrous. And terrible.

His brain, hate scabbed, telegraphed to his hands and feet, to his whole body; and, in the fraction of a second which it took him to clear the intervening space between him and the dervish, again the maddening obsession came to him that all mankind was plotting against him, conspiring to pull him down to their own ignoble level. They had taken away everything that he had prized: his pride, his lands, his feudal privileges, his thoroughbred stallions, his desert freedom. Only two things had remained to him: his house and his daughter. And now the first

was forfeit to the French; and the second—his daughter. . . ."

She, too . . .

"No!" he cried. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no!"

* * * *

His fist struck Hassan squarely between the eyes. Hassan went down. Mustaffa kicked him where he lay; kicked him with all his strength; in the face, the chest, the back, the groin. He bent. He picked him up. He stood him upon his feet. He knocked him down again. Again pulled him up. Kicked him again; in the face, the chest, the back, the groin.

Over and over, as if it were some hideous game of hide-and-seek.

He was drunk with rage; insane; blind.

He snarled, like a dog, with tongue protruding.

Again he bent down. His left hand gripped the other's lean throat, squeezing it like a vice, breaking the skin, feeling the hot, red blood, his fingers digging the flesh to quivering, agonized pulp, while his right hand rained blow after blow upon the defenceless face.

Drunk. Insane. Blind.

He saw nothing. Heard nothing. Only the vibrations in his own heart.

They surged up, immensely, chokingly, echoing with a terrible rhythm:

Kill—kill—kill. . . .

* * * *

It was all very brutal, very horrible, very pathetic and sordid and tragic and obscene: this strong-thewed, lawless man of the Shareefs, this giant who had lived most of his life in the open, this tough, full-blooded, splendid blending of bones and muscles

and tissues, battering the weak little student to pieces. Yet, unconscious at first, presently, gradually, the increasing pain of Mustaffa Madani's fingers boring into his flesh, brought back a semblance of consciousness to Hassan; and inside of his brain something like a colored glass ball shivered into a thousand, iridescent splinters. He hated, perhaps for the first time in his life. He fought back. His ludicrous little fists went like flails, bruising their knuckles on Mustaffa Madani's steely frame. His body wriggled and twisted as he tried to free himself from the dreadful grip that was squeezing out his life. He jerked his head frantically from side to side, endeavoring, helplessly, hopelessly, to escape the rain of blows. Nor was it altogether the instinct of self-preservation that made him fight back. There was, furthermore, in his dazed mind the singular conviction that, somehow, though he had never a chance to win and though he knew it, he was battling for his love, for Gouthia; and, clicking to the thought, his spirit gave the lie to his body. He was no longer the dervish, no longer the peaceful Islamic scholar. The savage, lawless Bedawin blood inherited from his ancestors screamed in his veins; and when for a second the other loosened his grip, he jerked his head down and sank his teeth into Mustaffa Madani's wrist with all his strength and desperation, causing the blood to trickle thickly. The next instant the cruel fingers closed once more about his throat.

Hassan could not speak. Mustaffa Madani did not. The fight was sinister in its quietude, with no noise except the shuffling of feet, Hassan's staccato, whistling breath as it was forced through tortured,

bursting lungs, and the grunts—animal-like, half sensuous—that came from the other's lips.

And so, finally, the Shareef dragged the young dervish to the door, through the hall, down the stairs.

He pushed him across the outer threshold into the street, and kicked the unconscious form while men and women ran up from all sides, from the bazaar, the houses, the Mosque of the Five Swords, excited, shouting, clamoring, protesting.

Someone rushed back into the mosque. He returned with the *mullah,* the priest.

The latter laid ineffectual hands upon Mustaffa Madani's arms.

"Sidi, Sidi!" he said. "You will stain your hands with a brother-Moslem's life blood! I beseech you. . . . "

Mustaffa Madani paid no attention.

He bent. He kicked. He struck. Struck again.

"May the Lord God let you see the right!" implored a gnarled, berry brown old Arab market-woman, her face veil awry, her weak fingers clutching at the man's burnoose.

A seam of the burnoose ripped. Once more the pitiless fist descended.

Blood. Pulped flesh. A cry of agony.

"No, no, no, my lord! Do it not!" exclaimed the orange-vendor.

Mustaffa Madani did not hear. His rage was the rage of the beast of prey. The vibrations in his heart were making him dizzy. He snarled like a wolf. Foam was on his lips.

The orange-vendor was afraid. But he was a decent man. He shook his head.

"No!" he said. "No—by my beard!"

He abandoned his basket of fruit, and, head foremost, he launched himself into the fray, tackling the Shareef around his stout, oak-like legs, trying to pull him away from his victim.

"Help, help, Moslems!" he begged.

And others took heart. They joined in. They dragged Mustaffa Madani away, while more people ran up, with excited questions and answers:

"What has happened, O daughter of the milk-seller?"

"As the Lord liveth!"—a finger pointed at Mustaffa Madani—"There standeth a murderer!"

"No, no! The lad still breathes!"

"Yes!" A fat Jewess bent over Hassan, touching his fluttering heart. She turned to her daughter. "Water, Deborah! Run!"

"What has the lad done—to be beaten so?"

"He is a thief!"

"The Sidi caught him!"

"No, no, he is no thief! Look—he is a dervish. . . . "

"Aye—a dervish. . . . "

"A holy man! Beloved by the Lord God!"

"Shame upon you, Sidi!" shrieked the old market-woman. "Shame—for attacking a dervish! May you in the hereafter roast in everlasting hell fire!"

"*Wah!* If I met you in hell I would not as much as spit on you to cool your burning, O assassin!"

"He drew a knife! I saw it with these eyes!"

"Yes—by my neck and the adorable Lord—I bear witness!"

Mustaffa Madani spoke through clenched teeth: "Let me go! Let me go!"

He struggled desperately. He tried to break away, to return to the attack. But a dozen hands held him.

"No, no!" said the orange-vendor. "The Lord lead you away from evil!"

"Rahmat Ullah—" mumbled the priest, helping the Jewess to pour water down Hassan's contracted, convulsed throat—"the Lord His mercy!"

Again the old market-woman broke into vituperations.

"A holy man! He has killed a holy man!" She shook a fist beneath the Shareef's nose. "Burn your father! Burn your mother! Bless you not the Lord God! Curse the unclean father of your head and belly!"

More confusion, excitement, noise—noise that finally drifted up to Gouthia's room to which she had retired and where she had sat dreaming of her love, her future.

* * * *

She ran to the balcony. She looked through the lattice. She saw; and a few moments later she was downstairs, followed by el-Fosiha.

The latter was clinging to her, trying to restrain her.

"Gouthia!" she implored. "Please—please—come back—consider the shame of it—the scandal! Come back, child! This is none of your meddling!"

The girl paid no heed to the old negress. She tore herself away from her restraining grip. She pushed through the crowd. She threw herself across the dirty, moaning, bleeding figure.

"O my beloved!" she cried. "O piece of my soul!"

She took the battered face in her hands. She kissed the bruised lips passionately.

There was a pause.

And then, in an agony of love and pain:

"What have they done to you, beloved? Allah! What have they done to you?"

She turned. She looked up.

"Who?" she asked, half knowing the answer, dreading it.

"He did it!" shrieked the market-woman, pointing at Mustaffa Madani. "Your own father! May the Devil rip out his heart and feed it to a mangy pig!"

* * * *

Gouthia rose.

She stared at her father. He stared back. Their implacable eyes met, contended. They were both of the Shareefs. Blood of his blood she was, and bone of his bone.

Their eyes never dropped; never wavered. It was like a duel to the death between two evenly skilled fencers, handling evenly tempered blades.

Then Gouthia spoke, in a flat, passionless voice:

"You are no longer my father! Dead you are to me until you come to me and beg mine and my lover's forgiveness on your knees!"

She bent again over Hassan.

"No!" she said to the orange-vendor who offered her his help. "He is mine, mine!"

With all her young strength she pulled him up. She half carried, half dragged him away, panting a little, but with head erect, eyes blazing, while the crowd made a path for her. She walked up to the mosque, the refuge of Islam. Just beyond the threshhold she stopped; turned. Her arms were about Has-

san, protectingly. His head was on her breast. His blood trickled down, staining her dress. She stood there, superb, savage, with something so ominous in her pose that a hush seemed to fall over the hectic, whispering throng.

A second passed; two; three.

Then she spoke.

"No longer my father—until you beg mine and my lover's forgiveness on your knees! No longer my father! I give oath before the Prophet—on Him the blessings!"

* * * *

He sat on the roof-top. His habitual, rather heavy serenity seemed restored to him. Only the veins on his temples were still swollen.

When he spoke to el-Fosiha who squatted in a corner, trembling, nervous, silent, staring at him, he did so with perfect composure:

"Bring me my hasheesh pipe."

She obeyed. She was about to sit down again.

"Go away!" he said. "Do not come unless I call you."

"But—you will have to have food . . . "

"Do not come unless I call you," he repeated, without raising his voice.

She salaamed.

"Listen is obey, Heaven-Born!"

She left.

* * * *

He smoked.

"No longer my father . . . "

The words seemed to come from very far. He listened to them, inclined his head, as with forced attention.

His daughter's voice. Distant and unearthly. Cruel. And so absurd.

No longer her father?

Why—she was his daughter.

He loved her. . . .

He smoked again. The hasheesh ghosts drew swiftly about him on silver grey wings, building around him a wall of fragrant, gossamer clouds.

Memories on the silver grey hasheesh wings.

Memories following down the narrow span of years; back to the day when el-Fosiha had come from his wife's bed and had laid a tiny bundle into his arms:

"A daughter, my lord! May life be wide to her!"

He remembered the first cry of that tiny, warm bundle. It had been like the morning cry of a wild bird.

He remembered her last cry, cold, hard:

"No longer my father!"

He smoked again.

He sat there on the roof-top until the sun died in a sickly haze of coppery brown—decayed, it seemed, like the sun on the Day of Judgment—and the moon came up, stabbed on the outer horns of the world, dispassionate, calm, indifferent to the heart of man.

He sat there, silent and stony, with a short, savage gesture at el-Fosiha who came up with food, that sent her scuttling down the stairs again, frightened, trembling, tripping on the last steps, falling with a great clatter of broken crockery.

He sat there till the wind came driving the dusk toward the east; till the sky flushed with green, like a curved slab of thick, opaque jade; till the

next day's sun glared hot and golden; till once more the mists of evening rose and coiled.

The mists of evening—the mists in his own soul!

He sat the next night through and watched the hiving stars swarm and swirl past the horizon. He watched them die, one by one.

He watched young day shoot up, racing along the rim of the world in a sea of fire, with purple shafts of light that put out the paling moon. He watched the east flush with pink and orange.

The noises of waking day.

Noises in the garden. A drowsy canticle. A bird was gurgling and twittering. A little furry bat cheeped dismally. A mousing owl rustled in the byre thatch. There was a metallic buzzing of flies around a puddle.

Noises in the street. Seething in frothy, brutal streaks. The snarling whine of Jews bartering over infinitesimal values. The loutish speech of Bedawins. The high, clipped tenor of Arab street merchants. A southern black's jungly cachinations.

He did not hear.

He watched a long streamer of north-bound birds, wild parrots tumbled out of their forest home by the wet sweep of the wind. They flopped about the lank palm trees, screeching uneasily, their motley finery bedraggled with drops of moisture.

A scout bird detached itself, flew down, then up, flanking the packed crowd of its comrades in long, graceful evolutions, finally leading them toward the northern hills which etched the sky line, peaked and hooded, jeering like a face, extending their sombre, scarred walls like a grim jest hewn out of granite—evilly infinite—a sooty smudge on the crimson and

gold blaze of day—like his thoughts . . . his thoughts—

The house under his feet.

Hollow. Empty.

Echoing memories.

The patter of little hard heels tapping the stone flags. A child's curly head, tinged with ruddy gold. A sturdy little body.

His daughter. His child. His only child.

Blood of his blood, and bone of his bone.

And her childish laughter, years ago, when el-Fosiha had told her ancient fairy tales: of the flea who tried to lighten the camel's load by jumping down; of Oguun, the patron Saint of little babes, whose fingers and toes were made of sugar cane and whose heart was a monstrous ball of pink sweetmeat baked in far China. . . .

Other memories.

Neighbor's children, allowed to come in. Awed at first at the great sombre Shareefian palace. Then forgetting their awe. Leaping. Dancing. Shouting. Laughing. Playing games.

Playing "The Hen and the Chicken."

Gouthia the leader of the game. Always the leader. She was a Shareef.

Another little girl—perhaps Sabha, the water carrier's daughter—kneeling blindfolded, the children forming a circle about her, and Gouthia singing:

"Beat the drum in the courtyard.
But for the cat, the mice would eat us up—
Root and branch—
Stem and twig—
Tree and leaf and flower!
Beat the drum in the courtyard!

For the father of Othman has come from the wars.
The father of Othman brought back a treasure.
The father of Othman has planted a garden—
A green garden—
A yellow garden—
A red garden—
A blue garden—
A garden, silver and gold.
The father of Othman has shouted his great war shout,
And the wall of the garden fell from the shout.
Beat the drum, the big drum, in the courtyard!
And answer:
What do you want—
The hen or the chicken?"

"The hen!" cried Sabha, the water carrier's daughter.

"Ouk—ouk—ouk!" Gouthia imitated the hen's cackle; and then, all the other little girls crowding around and tickling Sabha's back. . . .

And laughter.

Childish laughter.

Gouthia's laughter, gurgling, high-pitched:

"Hai! Hai! Hai!"

He remembered her high, clear laugh. He remembered her last words, so cold, so hard:

"No longer my father!"

He heard them, from the distance.

They tore his heart, ragged, paining, like a dull knife:

"No longer my father!"

And he sat there, hearing those words in his brain; hearing, that evening, triumphant yells drift up from the street:

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!"

A flaring of torches, blending into a golden sea. A marriage procession. Shouts from the bazaar crowds:

"Long life to the bridegroom!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"Who is he?"

"Hassan, the dervish!"

"Aye, O daughter of the milk-seller, and today he marries one of the lineage!"

"Today he mates with a Shareef!"

"May the Lord God strengthen his manhood!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

Hassan, the dervish—thought Mustaffa Madani. And Gouthia, his daughter. Little, little Gouthia.

The wedding night. The wedding bed. Hassan's body. His daughter's body. Together.

No, no, no!

They were only the figments of dreams. Dreams which he hated and feared. Dreams which he must kill.

With shaking fingers he filled his pipe. He lit it. He smoked.

The roof-top disappeared. Dreams disappeared.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"—from the street.

Somebody else's ears heard the shouts. Not his own ears.

The facts of the outer world touched him no longer with their hard, cutting edges. These facts were untrue. They were not. They were only the lying thoughts of the lying world. . . .

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"—from the street. . . .

* * * *

They married according to the rites and pomp of

Islam, the bride awaiting the bridegroom's coming in the little house that he had rented not far from the Caravanserai of the Saharan Traders, he riding sheykh Abubekr Sabri's blue-mottled stallion, two friends, young dervishes, at each side of the bridle, two more right and left having hold of the stirrups.

He was dressed in a bright, scarlet burnoose and wore on his head a black fez with a long silver tassel. He had discarded his dervish costume. A bridegroom, he belonged no longer to the *tekké* of the Molawees. His face was swathed in bandages.

"A brave lad!" laughed one of the dervishes. "He fought for his bride like a Bedawin!"

"Yes," chimed in the second. "Who would have imagined that our Hassan is a warrior?"

"Ah—a lion in Islam!" shouted one in the crowd.

A long procession. The *mullah,* white-bearded, green-turbaned. Young men waving lanterns and tall poles decked with flowers and ribbons. Others carrying torches that flamed red and gold. Still others tossing fireworks or strewing flowers. Small boys running up and down the length of the procession and sprinkling the bridegroom with rose water. Hired Jewish musicians—their services being among Abubekr Sabri's wedding gifts—bringing up the rear with a tremendous din of reed pipes and flutes and cymbals and drums and tamborines.

One of the dervishes raised his arms like a cheer leader.

"A long life to the bridegroom!" he shouted. "Cry yoo-yoo-yoo, O Moslems!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!" the sound was taken up in a quivering, bloating refrain.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!" the *mullah* himself echoed deep in his throat, forgetting his sacerdotal dignity.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!" shrieked the women, from behind their screened balconies, or rushing into the street, pressing flowers and sweets into Hassan's hands, and showering benedictions upon him:

"May the bride find your lips in spite of the bandages!"

"May Allah grant strength to your loins and to her womb!"

"May she bear as many men-children as there are hairs on your head!"

"May your deceased parents reach paradise!"

"Remember!" an old woman's shamelessly practical advice. "Musk cut with amber to rouse the waning passion! A drop behind the ear!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"What sayeth the Koran? 'Forgive thy wife seventy times a day!'"

Laughter.

More shouts:

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"A clever lad—this dervish! Throw him into the river—and he will rise with a fish in his mouth!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!"

Ban-ng went the crackers. Swish went the rockets. Swizz went the squibs. The street rushed with lights, scarlet-hearted, blue-tipped, yellow-frayed.

The wedding cortege filed around the corner, the torches blending into the purple of the night, their sparks of red and gold and green softened to a running play of rainbow colors, then dying altogether with just a single high-light still glistening, like the blood gleam in a black opal.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo . . ." very faintly from the distance, a mere memory of sound, while Hassan rode up to the little house near the Caravanserai of the Saharan Traders, dismounted, and entered the bride's room.

* * * *

She was waiting for him, sitting cross-legged on a low divan. She was veiled from head to foot. Beneath the veil, her face was painted and powdered in stark white and red. Her finger and toe nails were stained red with henna; so were the palms of her hands and her heels.

He salaamed.

"*Yah aini*—O eyes of my soul!" he said. "*Yah amri*—O my life!"

He lifted her veil. He kissed her lips. He bent and kissed her hands, her knees.

"I love you!" he whispered.

"And I love you!"

* * * *

Outside the little house, the crowd waited, eager, tense, expectant, but silent. The torches were held down, pressed slightly against the moist ground so that there was hardly any light.

The minutes passed slowly.

Then a window opened.

The crowd stirred, looked up, craning their necks. The torches were raised. They flared golden and yellow, bringing the scene into sharp relief.

Hassan had stepped out. He stood there, on the narrow balcony. High in his hands, according to the immemorial Arab custom, he waved the bed sheet, spotted with blood. He waved it like a banner of victory.

And again, from the street, immense, triumphant, almost hysterical, rose the shout:

"Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!"

The crowd dispersed.

Hassan returned to his wife.

"I love you, love you, love you!" he said, taking her into his arms. "Daily my love for you echoes through the vaults of my life. Daily my love for you is born again—poignant, challenging, restless, eternally virginal. Daily the thought of you comes to me with flute songs and flowers. Daily I seek you. . . ."

"Daily you shall find me, O my lord!" she said in a high, clear voice.

* * * *

Early morning. A wedge of elfin light coming through the window. The gleam of her white shoulders. The flame of her curving body. The greatness of her soul.

"Are you awake, dear?"

"Yes, Hassan."

"Let us thank the Lord God! Let us recite the Fatihah together!"

They rose. They knelt down side by side, heads touching the ground, hands outstretched.

Their voices blended:

"Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds!
The Compassionate, the Merciful!
King of the Day of Judgment!
Thee we worship, and Thee we ask for help!
Guide us in the straight path,
The path of those to whom Thou art gracious,
Not of those upon whom is Thy wrath
Nor of the Erring!"

* * * *

A week passed. He turned to her with a question:

"Are you happy, Gouthia?"

"More than happy, Hassan."

"More than happy?"

"Yes. I feel . . ." She hesitated.

"How?"

"It is hard to express, Hassan."

"Try, dear!"

"I feel—oh—right—just right!" Again she hesitated; slurred; found it difficult to choose words. "I—I am more sure. . . ."

"More sure of what? Of me? Of yourself?"

"No. Of—everything. Of Life. Life—it used to be two things: you and I. Now life is one thing—you—you know what I mean?"

"Yes, heart of my heart."

* * * *

They had no servants. He was too poor for it.

He made a humble living as scholars do, teaching in sheykh Abubekr Sabri's school for boys, penning letters for the illiterate, giving spiritual advice to men about to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, writing out prayers and incantations against sickness and the evil eye, and instructing young theological students in the groundwork of Islamic lore: the *Nahw* or syntax, the *Fikh* or law, the *Hadith* or table talk and traditions of the Prophet, and the *Tafsir* or exposition of the Koran.

Besides—once a dervish, always a dervish. And since as a married man he could no longer belong to the Lodge of the Molawees, he joined another dervish Lodge: the *Trikat-el-Mohammedia,* the Lodge of the Senussis, as foreigners call it.

He was a mild and gentle man, yet of iron resolve and typically Semitic tenaciousness of purpose, and so he was happy in his new Lodge. For while the Senussis believed in the *"Imamat,"* a Moslem theocracy embracing all True Believers and were in consequence opposed to secular government by foreign, Christian nations, they wished for no bloodshed, no violence, no sudden revolution. They were intelligent, slow, sincere, stubborn, and very peaceful, and to realize their political ambitions they preferred to advance carefully, warily, step by step, without evident force, without haste, without impatience—but also without compromise of any sort. Altogether Hassan could not have found a happier spiritual and intellectual milieu, and he used their *tekké* as a place in which to carry on his work.

He lived the life of the average Moslem. Outside his house, it was his brain, his mind, his intellect which ruled him; inside his house, once he had doffed his turban and changed his shoes for soft, yellow leather slippers, he was ruled by his soul, his heart, his body, his emotions.

With marriage Gouthia gave up her studies; gave up all thought of becoming a teacher.

Her work was now in the house. She cooked. She washed. She embroidered. She did everything. Rarely did they have enough money to hire a Saharan negress to come in for the heavy labor.

So they both worked hard. But there was always laughter in the house.

There was always the bloom of dreams.

There was always their faith, their youth, their love.

* * * *

And summer passed and the short winter when the desert came into its own, with burning days and chilly nights that swept the yellow sands into rigid, carved breadths, that covered the rock waste with its fitful, scraggly, tangled overgrowth of tamarack and drinn and dwarfed acacia, that crinkled the surface of the land into blanched hollows where the shadows danced a purple saraband.

Then December came, bringing the beginning of the Saharan spring, with soft winds and blue lights and the melody of the young year, like a slow sob of melting harmonies.

Out in the desert this was the time of the *rahia,* the short, sweet spring herbiage, with wild rape and sorrel and pimpernel giving green food and new life to the nomads' small, parched cattle, bloating the camels' dried udders, stippling delicate pastel drops amidst the barren sandstone gravel, covering the shallow rock pools with a thin, silverish film of moisture, deepening the greenish black of the laurel wolds.

Here, in el-Korma, the palm trees were putting out their great spikes of green and their plumes of waxen, white blossoms.

The days grew longer.

The sky was tight, high-vaulted, of a milky, shimmering blue.

* * * *

Never once during all those months did Gouthia speak of her father.

Perhaps she had forgotten him.

Perhaps she remembered to forget him every time she saw the ugly, red scar that twisted across her husband's face from chin to temple.

Hassan mentioned him once.

He had been to see Abubekr Sabri, and the latter had quoted the Koran to him:

"'The Lord God loveth not the haughty and the unforgiving!' said the Prophet—on Him peace! And did He not command the True Believers not to step haughtily? Did He not say that pride can neither cleave a rock nor cause man to equal the mountains in stature? And Jesus, the great Saint—on Him the salute!—did He not say to the doubter: 'The world is but a bridge. Pass over it, but build no houses there. The world is but an hour. Spend it in devotion' . . .? Come, my son—" kissing Hassan on both cheeks—"bury the old Adam. And consider—has not Mustaffa Madani been punished by Fate itself?"

"Yes," admitted the other.

* * * *

For it was known to all el-Korma that the government had evicted the Shareef and had sold his house for taxes.

The French, led by M. Esterneaux of the department of interior revenue, resplendent in unseasonable frock coat, correct silk hat with eight high-lights and vast tricolor sash accentuating his comfortable paunch, had brought a platoon of police, a half company of Chasseurs d'Afrique and forty Zouaves, besides holding a company of Joyeux in reserve and placing machine guns near the Mosque of the Five Swords, at the bazaar entrances, and at the corners of the rue de la Kasbah and the rue Sidi-Maknez.

"Rather a ridiculous precaution, don't you think?" a visiting Paris journalist had said to the governor-general. "Like shooting at a flea with a rifle. After all, that Shareef is only one man—with no servants except that old negress of his. He has no retainers,

no adherents of any sort. He cannot offer armed resistance—and I understand that the natives do not exactly love him. . . ."

"They do not. They dislike him," Count de Lubersac-Crespigny had replied.

"Then why all this sabre rattling? Why all this glittering pomp and circumstance of war? Why do we French always behave like Prussians the moment we leave France? Why—if Paris hears of this, it will laugh itself sick—it may laugh loud and long enough to tear your official head from your official shoulders."

"Possibly. But I know what I am doing, *monsieur,*" had come the governor-general's stilted reply.

"Oh——?"

"Yes."

"May I inquire——?"

"These people are Arabs, Moslems. You can never be sure of them—their reasoning, their reactions, their psychology. When they see a Shareef, a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, evicted by us, thrown into the street by foreigners, Frenchmen, Christians—well—they may laugh—on the other hand they may . . . They dislike Mustaffa Madani. Right. But they dislike us more. And in Islam revolutions happen rather suddenly. There is no warning. No crystallizing of public opinion. No preparation. A word. The point of a dagger. Bloodshed. Then panic—a whole city running amuck—I know . . ." He had sighed reminiscently—"I was in Algiers when Abu Bagdadi proclaimed *jherid jahud,* holy war. I was in Kairouan when the dervishes of the Brotherhood of Sidi Mohammed Tidjini declared that a *Moulay Saa,*

a Messiah, had appeared! Each time the storm was upon us suddenly. No warning."

"You suffer from too much imagination. That's the whole trouble with you."

"I am usually accused of having too little imagination, *monsieur.*"

"At all events it will be interesting," the journalist had replied. "I shall go and watch the circus."

But he had been disappointed.

Crowds of Arabs had come, expectant, eager, tense, whispering in gliding undertones. Perhaps, at a word from Mustaffa Madani, in spite of their dislike of him and in spite of soldiers and machine guns, they might have made trouble. But the Shareef had been quite peaceful. He had offered no resistance.

In response to M. Esterneaux' challenge, he had come to the outer gate. Without a word, without a gesture, he had listened to the pompous, legal order of eviction. He had stared at the Frenchman with a mask-like face that had held the coldness of death, cloaking whatever fury or sense of outrage had been in him.

Only when, followed by el-Fosiha, he had stepped across the threshold of his house—his house no longer—he had spoken to M. Esterneaux, in French:

"So the house has been sold, eh?"

"Yes, *monsieur.*"

"Who bought it?"

"One Moses Maimonides."

And Mustaffa Madani had broken into a roar of laughter.

"Laughter," the Paris journalist had described it in his article to his home paper, *"that fell like a blight. Guttural laughter that rose and peaked and*

spread, until it seemed that the town of el-Korma, the houses, the mosques, the bazaars, the creeping, squatting desert, the hills, were echoing the sound of it. Laughter that shook the furry palms, that made the flowering creepers shed their spikes. Laughter that shivered the tufted grass in the neglected garden, that caused the driver-ants to roll themselves into tight, pinkish-grey, unobtrusive balls, that sent the tiny scorpions scurrying for cover. Laughter as if at a joke hatched in hell . . ."

Thus the Paris journalist. But then he had imagination. That's how he made his living.

* * * *

So Mustaffa Madani had left the house of his ancestors. Accompanied by el-Fosiha, he had gone to the only place left him, the miserable, stony little patch of olive trees on the outskirts of town where the two lived in a small building that was no more than a mud-chinked hut.

* * * *

"Has not Mustaffa Madani been punished by Fate itself?" repeated Abubekr Sabri.

"Yes," admitted Hassan.

The other sighed.

"Allah alone knoweth how he lives," he continued. "I offered him tenderness. I offered him help. I offered him money and a home. But he will not talk to me—and I am his best friend. Belike he blames me because it was I who brought you into his house, his life. I saw him only once—and how he has changed, Hassan! Allah, Allah—I cry Thee mercy!"

* * * *

He described to Hassan the ramshackle hut with the single, broken window and the bough of an olive

tree lashing heavily against it in the desert blast; el-Fosiha squatting over a tiny, open charcoal fire, keeping it alive with all the strength of her old lungs; the wretched food on the table, a handful of shriveled olives and a bowl of cooked barley; the appalling dirt; and Mustaffa Madani sitting there on the threshold, staring, brooding, no longer the well-fleshed, careless giant, but grey-faced, sunk into himself, the skin on his throat hanging loose and flabby and the eyes red rimmed—"like those of a hasheesh smoker, Hassan, and indeed el-Fosiha whispered to me that the only thing he brought from the house was a large ball of the wretched drug"—and his soul no longer finely tempered and stoutly braced.

"When he saw me," the sheykh went on, "he closed his eyes, as if unable to bear the sight of me, as if I recalled to his mind all the dreadful, recent happenings. I offered him help, money, a home, and he said No—'No! No! No!'—over and over—and there was no arguing. There was no budging him. I spoke of Gouthia. He looked at me hard-eyed. 'Forgive her,' I pleaded. He shook his head. 'She is fully as guilty as her lover,' he replied. 'I know her no more. If my right hand offends me I cut it off.' 'And if your heart offends you,' I said to him, 'would you cut it out—and die? Gouthia is your heart, Sidi!' I tried to reason with him, and suddenly he turned on me. Allah—I thought for a moment that he was going to strike me. 'God's curse on you!' he cried. But he controlled himself almost at once. He regained his manners. He salaamed. He begged my pardon. 'We will not throw stones at one another,' he said. 'We are too old friends for that. But, Sabri effendi, if you love me come no more to see me. For I suffer!'

Those were his last words, Hassan—'I suffer!'—And you know his harsh, unyielding soul—'I suffer—'"

Hassan was silent.

"There is no hate against him in my heart," he replied after a while. "But what can I do?"

"You? Personally? Nothing."

"I am willing to go to him—to talk to him . . ."

"No, no!" exclaimed Abubekr Sabri. "This time he will kill you."

"Well—then—what can I do? I don't see how . . ."

"There's your wife——"

"Gouthia——"

"Yes. She must go to him. She must implore his forgiveness."

Hassan shook his head.

"She never mentions him," he said. "She, too, is a Shareef."

"A hard, hard breed," sighed Abubekr Sabri. "Like stone. And yet—perhaps we need them in Islam. Of late I have thought that perhaps you and I are not hard enough—to cope with these Christians, these foreigners who . . ." He interrupted himself; jerked back his thoughts. "Yes. Gouthia must go to him."

"She will not do so. I know her."

"But she loves you, Hassan. She will do it for love of you. Speak to her. Beg her . . ."

"I shall try," replied Hassan.

* * * *

He did so that night on his return from the *tekké* of the Senussis.

"I spoke today to the sheykh Abubekr Sabri, Gouthia."

"How is he?"

"He mentioned your father. He said . . ."

"I have no father," she interrupted him.

"Listen, dear . . ."

"An orphan, I came to you."

"Gouthia—please—listen to me! The sheykh told me that your father . . ."

"My father is dead."

Her voice was hard and level and passionless. There was not even the faintest echo of a conflict within herself. Her lips neither tightened nor trembled. A perfect, terrible candor was in her brown eyes so that they appeared flat, almost expressionless. There was not a single one of her features, there seemed not a single corner of her soul, through which doubt, misgiving, emotion of any sort may have traversed and left its mark. Unflinching she was; relentless; inexorable. A Shareef—Hassan said to himself—a conservative, of that implacable breed whose own soul is the only gauge they have for others, whose own pride is the only touchstone they have for others; and he thought—was frightened at the thought, rejected it immediately—how he could hate her if he did not happen to love her. If only she had one little tremor of weakness—one single fissure in her armor through which a shaft might pass . . .

He sighed.

"You are—oh—a little unhuman, best beloved!" he said.

"Am I? And yet I love you. . . ."

"Yes—you do love me!" He thought of Abubekr Sabri's words. "And just because you love me—please . . ."

"There is kous-kous for dinner tonight," she said

casually, "and your favorite wheat pilaff with raisins and pistache nuts. And, Hassan dear, run to the bazaar. I forgot to buy coffee. And perhaps a little bag of French sweets—if your pupils paid you well today. . . ."

And she went into the kitchen.

* * * *

It was on the following afternoon, a Friday, while Hassan was at prayer in the Mosque of the Five Swords, that el-Fosiha came to the little house near the Caravanserai of the Saharan Traders.

According to the custom of Islam when entering a friend's house, she opened the door without knocking.

She salaamed.

"May the Lord God lead you, Gouthia!" she said.

* * * *

Gouthia had been busy with wooden pestle and bowl, pounding white Moroccan figs, wild honey and anis seeds into paste. She looked up, startled. Then, as her father had done when he had seen Abubekr Sabri, she closed her eyes momentarily, as if unable to bear the sight of her, as if el-Fosiha recalled to her mind the dreadful, recent happenings.

She pulled herself together.

She walked up to the old negress. She kissed her tenderly.

"I am happy to see you, nurse," she said.

"And I, too—" the old negress' voice shivered—"I am happy—so happy, little, little soul!"

El-Fosiha burst into tears; and Gouthia, all her old love for the other returning with a sweet, wild rush, put her arms about her.

"Please—please—" she begged—"you must not cry! No, no . . ."

"How can I help it? After all these long months" —el-Fosiha smiled through her tears. She dried her eyes with the edge of her burnoose. "But never mind about me," she went on. "I came to speak to you of . . ."

"You may speak to me of anything and everything," cut in Gouthia with flat, chilly words, "except of him who was once my father."

"Child!" exclaimed the other with agonized entreaty. "Listen to me . . ."

"Allah may forgive him. Not I."

"You do not mean it!"

"I do! Never, never, never shall I forgive him—not until he implores mine and Hassan's forgiveness on his knees!"

"You do not mean it! You cannot!"

"I do!" came the calm, even voice of justice.

She rose. She looked curiously tall and strong in the level shafts of the falling sun that danced through the window with purple shadows.

"Gouthia—" implored el-Fosiha—"remember—your father is . . ."

"What?"

"Old—old! And poor . . ."

"And I am young and poor!"

"He is your father!"

"No longer! He was my father—I was his daughter! Pah—the young ravens are beaked like the old!"

"He is a Shareef, child! He is of the lineage!"

"And——?"

"There are his ancient rights and privileges. He is his own law."

"Am I less a Shareef than he? Am I less of the lineage than he? Does his pride surpass my pride, his privileges my privileges? His laws are his own, you say? Good—by the face of God—so are my laws mine own laws."

"But he is a man, Gouthia."

"What of it?"

"It is hard for us women at times to judge a man."

"And I am a woman. Then let no man judge me."

"Man," said the old negress, shocked to the core by such heresy, "is creation."

"Is he indeed?"

"Yes."

Gouthia laughed. There was challenge in her eyes, and proud assurance.

"And yet," she said, "it is myself who this day feel in my heart the stir and rustle of creation—like little wings—like soft hands beating gently, gently beneath my heart . . ."

"You—oh—?" el-Fosiha stammered; suddenly understood: "You are pregnant?"

"Yes. Before the end of spring—Allah willing—I shall bear a child to my lord!"

"May Allah give you good chance! May it be a man-child!"

* * * *

The old negress salaamed, awed by the eternal feminine mystery of conception and birth.

She threw herself on the floor, touching it with forehead and flat palms, facing the east.

"Praised be the name of the Lord, the Most High," she prayed, "who hath made and completely formed his creatures, and who determineth them to various ends, and directeth them to attain the same, and who

produceth the pasture for cattle and fields for grain and the trees for various fruits, and man and woman for the creating of children!"

She rose.

She snapped her fingers rapidly to ward off the winds of misfortune. Her wrinkled, plum colored features spread into a wide, toothless grin. The grin expanded into a laugh, triumphant, high, shrill; the laugh into a throaty, quivering cry of joy:

"Yoo-yoo-yoo! Yoo-yoo-yoo! Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

She knelt before Gouthia. She covered her hands and knees with quick, bird-like kisses.

"Aye, by God, the Holder of the Scales of Law with the Strength of His Hands!" she exclaimed. "Let it be a man-child, a twirler of steel, a breaker of stones, a proud stepper in the councils of fighting-men! Allah, Allah—give Thou to this Moslema a little son, to complete the house, to give meaning and strength to her life! A man-child, O Allah, I pray Thee! A man-child, broad-bodied and without a blemish!"

Again she broke into a quivering, throaty:

"Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!"

She laughed and cried at the same time.

"Gouthia," she went on, "just because of the child to come—the little son to come—go to your father—the child's grandfather. . . ."

"Just because of the child to come shall I steel my will," Gouthia replied. "Child of mine? Yes. But child, too, of my husband, my lord, him whom he who was once my father insulted most foully and beat most brutally—whom he kicked from the door, nearly killing him, scarring his beloved face. No, no,

el-Fosiha. I have given oath to the Prophet Mohammed—on Him the salute!"

* * * *

The negress sighed. She bowed her head.

She knew the breed—bitter, proud, unyielding, ruthless.

"It is the Lord God's will," she mumbled with weak resignation.

Then she fell to talking of intimate things.

"I myself have borne eight children, Gouthia," she said, "not counting the twins which I bore your father. Twenty-seven times was I a grandmother, and nine times a great-grandmother. I know all about it. . . ."

"Hassan spoke of a French doctor who . . ."

"Cursed be all doctors! Chiefly French doctors! All they want is to touch a woman's body with their greedy fingers—and, besides, get paid for it! And a French doctor—a foreigner, an unbeliever—to see you naked—child—have you lost your mind——?"

"Hassan says that . . ."

"The Lord His mercy! Hassan is a man. Thus a fool. Nine times was I a great-grandmother! Will your Hassan teach me how to bear children? You listen to me! First of all—have you a *hijab?*"

"A *hijab*—an amulet?" asked Gouthia. "What for?"

"Then you haven't one?"

"No!"

"Allah!" exclaimed the negress. "It is lucky for you that I came here today. Almost a sending of providence! A child in your womb—and no *hijab* about your neck! And you claim to be a grown-up woman—and your husband claims to be a dervish, a

learned man! And—Allah, Allah!—you have no *hijab!*"

"But what do I want it for?"

"If you do not wear one, your child will be born head first and will, therefore, be a murderer some day. It is an assured thing. We must have one made immediately. I know a Moghrareba, a western Moorish woman, who will write you out the proper sort. For seven days you must wear it next to your heart, then dissolve the ink in water and drink it. And—the diet . . ."

"Yes?"

"You must not drink buttermilk."

"I am fond of buttermilk."

"Drink it—and you will curdle your child's brain! It will be insane! No. No buttermilk. Not a drop. But lots of fish sherbet to cool the blood and lessen the pain, and leeches on your back once a month, and plenty of herb tea made of sweet-smelling *al-shay* grass to oil the womb and make the birth easy. And—" warming to her subject—"cut three hairs from your husband's beard and three nail parings from his fingers and pluck three feathers from a live, white rooster's tail, and carry it all in a bag night and day, if you desire a son. And wear blue next to your skin to draw off the heat of the world. And sleep facing the east, and let not the full moon fall on your face. And cook your breakfast every morning on a fire made of dried donkey dung—no, no—do not laugh, child—this is very important, unless you want your child to be a cripple! And the horoscope for the child—" she went on feverishly—"I shall cast the horoscope myself, tonight, at sundown. There is not much time to be lost. Quick! *Ala math iddy*—

give me something that you have touched, something from the salt of your hands to the salt of my hands—to make the auspices right. Yes—a handkerchief—that will do! And remember—no buttermilk! And plenty of fish sherbet! The salute! The salute!"

And she swept from the room like a small, plum-colored whirlwind, and hurried back to the hut on the outskirts of el-Korma.

* * * *

There, gathering a handful of sand, stirring it with a stick, dropping the white of an egg on it and watching how it curdled, she read the horoscope, calling upon Allah and the Prophet, upon Moses and Jesus and Abraham and Jacob, upon the Angels of the Left Hand and those of the Right Hand, upon the Twelve Imams, the fourteen Holy Innocents, the forty Abdals, and the forty-seven True Saints; calling too—if the truth be told, and since there was no Moslem priest near to threaten her with hell fire—upon the ancient African voodoo gods and fetishes of her youth.

And thus Mustaffa Madani found her when he returned late that evening.

* * * *

He had been in the desert, far out, away from the caravan trail; and, somehow, he had imagined that the desert, so motionless and unchanging behind its shifting veil of sand, was staring at him, was trying to speak to him with a terrific language of reproach and mockery.

He had closed the shutters of his soul; had carefully fastened them with the stubbornness of his pride.

There had been no sound except, once, the cry of a carrion-hawk, poised high on quivering wings.

Slowly the sun had climbed down the horizon, softening the blue sky lane for the coming of the stars, its dying rays coiling among the glittering quartz grains of the desert like colored snakes.

And he had sat there, silent and stony, trying not to think, trying not to feel, until gradually, for the first time since Gouthia had left him, peace had stolen over him—peace of not thinking, not feeling, almost not living—peace of the desert—silence in the desert—silence in his tortured soul.

Numbed, his soul. Inert. Torpid.

Yet, though numbed and inert and torpid, his soul had seemed free again, free of the past, free of pain and the remembrance of pain, free as a summer morning upon windy, green fields—when, from very far at first, but distinct in the whelming, swathing stillness, a voice had drifted to his ears, shivering the silence in the desert, shivering the silence in his soul.

A chanting voice, with a nasal, trembling, throaty note of religious hysteria . . . coming steadily nearer:

"When the sun shall be wrapped up,
And when the stars shall tumble down,
And when the mountains shall be powdered to dust,
And when the ten-months camels shall be neglected,
And when the wild beasts shall be huddled together. . . ."

nearer, ever nearer—

"And when souls shall be joined to their dead bodies,
And when the Books shall be laid open,
And when the sky shall be peeled off,

And when Hell shall be set ablaze,
And when Paradise shall be brought near,
Then the soul shall know what it hath wrought. . . ."

The chanting had become quite clear. The singer had appeared around the corner of a chalk rock, tall, emaciated, dressed in rags, bare-headed, wild-eyed.

Mustaffa Madani had recognized him: One Abeydillah el-Musselmanny, a Jew turned Moslem for love of woman, who, for love and jealousy of the same woman, had committed murder, had been in prison nearly twenty years, had come out of prison as he was today—a religious fanatic, wandering all over Tunis, here today and there tomorrow, chanting his hysterical prayers—an insane man, thus beloved by Allah, sacrosanct, safe wherever he went—whom none may ask "Whence dost thou come?" or "Whither dost thou go?"

He had seen Mustaffa Madani; had stood still; had looked at the other as if considering.

"You—" he had asked, a clear cell in his sick, clogged brain seeking remembrance—"you are the Shareef—the Shareef who . . ."

"Yes."

"Ho!" Suddenly Abeydillah el-Musselmanny had broken into maniacal laughter; had repeated over and over again, like the response in some satanic litany: "Then the soul shall know what it hath wrought—*hayah, hayah, hayah!*—the soul shall know what it hath wrought. . . ."

He had danced there in his mad way before Mustaffa Madani, with mincing steps, grotesque, ludicrous; lifting his burnoose, showing his filth-covered nakedness, gesturing obscenely; twisting, whirling,

tripping; had turned on his heel with a pirouette like a ballerina; had danced away into the desert, still chanting his hysterical prayers:

"And I swear by the stars that hide,
That move swiftly and hide,
And by the darkening night,
And by the breath of dawn. . . ."

—decreasing—and very faintly, from afar:

Nor is mine the speech of a pelted devil!
Then whither go ye?
Whither goeth your soul,
Except where Allah commandeth,
The Lord of the World. . . ."

—the voice had drifted away, swallowed by the golden, coiling sands; and a shiver had run over Mustaffa Madani; a great turmoil had surged through him, beyond control, beyond prayer, beyond his pride even, running into something molten and liquid that invaded every corner of his being, finally emerging, as from a mold, into the solid fact of his grief, his loneliness; and he had shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

He had gone home.

* * * *

"What devil's devicing are you doing there—mumbling to yourself and burning filth like an old witch?"

His voice startled el-Fosiha. She had not heard his approach.

"I am casting a horoscope," she replied, the suddenness of the question forcing the truth from her, "reading the future, Sidi."

He laughed.

"Hm—" he sneered—"I know what the future holds for you and me."

"Allah will take care of mine," she replied boldly, "and Shaitan, the Devil, the Stoned, will take care of yours belike. I am reading the future of one yet unborn."

"Whose?"

"That of your grandchild."

"Eh——?" He was startled; stared at her, wild-eyed.

"Yes!" el-Fosiha continued. "The little child which Gouthia, your daughter, will bear to her husband—may it be a man-child!"

"Glory be to the Most High who . . ." The words bubbled to his lips while a deep glow warmed his soul.

But, almost immediately, he cut them off, in mid-air. His lips froze into a thin, hard line.

"I have no daughter," he said.

"A lie! A wicked, putrid, stinking, black lie, O creature!" shrieked the old negress. "You have a daughter—and a son-in-law and soon—with Allah's help—a little grandson!"

She cowered as Mustaffa Madani raised his hands in a threatening gesture. Then she reached up to him and embraced his knees when, suddenly, he collapsed into a chair, great sobs racking his frame.

"Heaven-Born!" she cried. "Please—oh . . ."

He did not reply. He was thinking of his life, of Gouthia's life, again as on that day when she had left him, following it back through the years, to the day when el-Fosiha had come from his wife's bed and had laid a tiny bundle into his arms:

"A daughter, my lord! May life be wide to her!"

The first cry of that tiny, warm bundle. Like the morning cry of a wild bird.

Her last cry, cold, hard, on the threshold of the Mosque of the Five Swords:

"No longer my father!"

* * * *

"I have no daughter," he repeated, "I have nothing —nothing . . ."

He looked into the shadows with a steady stare, dreadful, unblinking as an image of stone.

Then, very quickly, as though obeying a sudden thought, he went to the door and stepped out into the night.

El-Fosiha ran after him.

"Where are you going?" she cried.

He did not answer. She peered from the threshold, calling again. She saw no sight of him. The night had swallowed him.

There was nothing out there except the black, scarred countenance of the desert, immense, lonely. There was no sound except, far off, the yelp of a jackal that crossed the waste, swiftly, greyly, like an evil thought.

* * * *

On that night, as on all nights, there was in the *tekké* of the Molawee dervishes the droning of music, melancholy, in a minor key, then peaking up into a shriek, again dying away into minor, sobbing cadences.

Sheykh Abubekr Sabri sat cross-legged on a mat at the farther end. He seemed like a golden idol, his body rigid, only his hands waving slowly to and fro as if making hypnotic passes.

He was chanting in a low, clear voice:

"Allahoo! Allahoo! Allahoo!" while the dervishes whirled in a circle, with arms straight out, the palms of the right hands turned up, those of the left turned down, all gyrating at different speeds, yet in obedience to the staccato thump of the drums.

Their skirts stood out like huge, white wheels. Their bare, sweat-drenched heels made a hissing sound as they tapped the floor.

"Allah akbar!"

"W'ellah!"

"Ah b'illah!",

they cried, some moving like rapidly spinning tops, with eyes wide open, faces tortured into hysterical grimaces, others turning slowly and delicately, with closed eyes, a dreamy smile on their lips.

The swing of the dance increased gradually. The cries rose and bloated. The music droned.

The sheykh Abubekr Sabri, staring with hypnotic eyes, guided the dancers with the movements of his hands and the telepathic strength of his mind.

The scented incense smoke swirled up, wavering and glimmering like molten gold, blazing with the deep, transparent yellows of amber and topaz, blending through a stark, crimson incandescence into metallic blue, then trembling into jasper and opal flames. It poured through the *tekkè* until everything seemed veiled, unreal—the devotees, the sheykh, and the spectators who crowded a narrow platform that was separated from the dancers by a low, wooden railing.

Amongst them, watching fascinatedly, nerves tense and quivering, was Mustaffa Madani.

He had come here on an impulse; more than an

impulse; rather as if obeying a mysterious command that had spoken to him across the distance, out of the night, out of the nowhere, with a great whirring of wings—like the wings of a soul, his own soul, tortured, agonized, suffering, trying to escape the cage of the flesh. Not that he had put it so to himself. For he was not an Occidental. Thus he was not given to psychic, or even to intellectual, acrobatics. Perhaps he was too simple for it; perhaps he was too stupid. But sitting there in his hut, with el-Fosiha mumbling about the past, thinking that he had lost his daughter, that he had lost his grandchild yet unborn, that he had lost everything, that he had nothing left him in all the world, suddenly he had felt immense sound vibrations filling the room, the air, the cavity between his eyes and his brain. These vibrations—felt, not heard—had seemed to drift from very far, rising and falling in a regular pulse, in great, rhythmical waves; touching his heart with huge, elemental hands; stealing upon his astral self with a dimly prophetic sense; stirring the inexhaustible and mysterious regions beneath the surface of his soul. He had become aware of enormous, muting, cosmic forces hovering about him, drawing him on and away. The vibrations had gradually increased in volume, had swollen to a pouring, singing flood, appalling, awesome, yet infinitely tender, like the voices of little children; filled, somehow, with stars, with blue, hazy distances, with flowers and trees, with a clean space and breadth of air, with the sweep and breath of nature; with an intricate pattern of voices that merged at its centre into a central harmony. He had been unable to tell if they were the resonances of human voices or of the desert wind. But there had

been at their core, vaguely, as the memory of the dervish chant: *"Allahoo! Allahoo!"* and they had been compelling, irresistible. They had pulled him from his chair, across the threshold, out into the night.

El-Korma—though he had hardly noticed it, had crossed it like a man in a dream—had come to him as often before, with a rush of purple and black, with lamps glimmering in posterns, red, golden-tipped, with night prowlers and the whining of beggars and the acrid smell of the gutters; and steadily the compelling sound vibrations had increased, urging him on, until he had found himself here, in the *tekké* of the Molawees, staring through the incense smoke into the sheykh's hypnotic eyes.

* * * *

The sheykh's eyes stared back.

"I have commanded!" said the eyes. "You have heard! You have obeyed! You have come! *Allahoo!*"

Mustaffa Madani wondered if it was the clogging aroma of the incense working on his nerves. But, somehow, he felt as if a released projection of Abubekr Sabri's consciousness were flowing out to meet his.

"You have come!" said the sheykh's eyes. *"Allahoo!"*

"Allahoo!" the sheykh's lips formed the word; tossed it free.

"Allahoo! Allahoo!" echoed the dervishes, whirling away in a great wind, while again, as on that day when Abubekr Sabri had interpreted to him for the first time the esoteric mystery and rites of the Molawees, Mustaffa Madani was conscious of the

overpowering spell of it enveloping him, breaking down his will.

* * * *

Next to him, on the spectators' platform, stood a very old Arab, trembling in every limb, tears running down his wrinkled, berry-brown cheeks, mumbling with toothless gums:

"O Allah! O Lord of Daybreak! Protect me against the blackness of the night when it overtaketh me!"

"Allahoo!" cried the dervishes. *"Allahoo!"*

They whirled away. The music droned.

Another spectator, an enormous Saharan negro, jumped up and down like one possessed, foam on his lips, his yellowish eyes rolling in hysterical franzy.

"The Smiting!" he yelled. "What is the Smiting?"

And, from a dozen lips, came the Koranic prophecy:

"The Smiting! What is the Smiting?
And what shall teach thee what the Smiting is?
The Day when men shall be like scattered moths,
And the mountains like carded wool!
Then as for him whose scales are heavy—
His shall be a life well-pleasing.
And as for him whose scales are light—
His abode shall be the bottomless Pit. . . ."

"O Allah!" rose the old Arab's quivering, ludicrous falsetto. "I cry Thee Mercy! I cry Thee help!"

"Hie ye to repentance!" yelled the negro, jumping up and down, so that the boards creaked and protested, threatening to break. "Hie ye to salvation, O Moslems! One the God is!"

The music droned.

"Allahoo!"

The Molawees whirled—whirled away . . .
"Allahoo!"
"Allahoo!"

* * * *

A quiver of excitement ran through Mustaffa Madani. It touched his soul, electrifying him. It touched, too, his body, with an immense sexual elation. He felt as he had on that day, many years earlier—he had been a boy of twelve—when for the first time in his life he had felt the touch of a woman's body, a woman's passion, his own passion. And, quite suddenly, he understood that here, in the whirling, cosmic dance before Allah's seven-stepped throne, was a tremendous secret and goal, more important than mere individual life, than pride of race and blood, more important even than love or grief or hate.

He rose. He cleared the wooden railing of the platform.

He jumped into the centre of the floor.

He heard his own voice coming harsh and grating and guttural as from across illimitable distance:

"Allahoo! Allahoo! Allahoo!"

He felt himself spinning away, swaying, gyrating. He was aware of no giddiness; no bodily sensation now of any sort.

But, deep in his being, he was conscious of a huge elation, half spiritual, half sensuous.

The reed-pipes shrilled. The drums beat. The incense rose in a scented, opalescent cloud . . .

And, the next day, in the Bazaar of the Mutton-Butchers where she had gone to buy meat for her dinner, Gouthia overheard two shopkeepers' conversation:

"Have you heard the news?"

"Your wife has three new lovers? The Bey effendi's pet chicken has given birth to an elephant?"

"No, no. Real news. Mustaffa Madani—the Shareef—you remember . . .?"

Gouthia stopped. She listened. Her heart beat a little faster.

"Assuredly I remember him," replied the other. "A haughty man who considers the strings of his cotton drawers equal in splendor to the Bey effendi's breeches of state!"

"Haughty no longer!"

"He must be dead!"

"No. He has become a man of God."

"He has?"

"Yes."

"*Wah!* Then there is hope for the Devil himself."

"It is true though. Mustaffa Madani has joined the Molawee dervishes."

"Impossible! Can a frog catch cold?"

"I saw him whirl in the dance. By the honor of my neck—I saw him with these eyes."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Oh well—God is Most Great!"

"Indeed. He is the One God!"

* * * *

Gouthia went home.

She felt strangely disturbed. Her heart hurt, almost as if somebody had squeezed and bruised it.

She was on the point of telling her husband; less because of the news—he would hear it soon enough, in the gliding gossip of bazaar and marketplace, or

in the unctuous, episcopal gossip of the *tekké* of the Senussi dervishes--than because of the longing and regret in her soul. This longing and regret she was unable to subdue and eradicate by will power or even by pride, although she succeeded in controlling it, in not permitting it to materialize. Having come into the gloom of her bitter decision, she did not budge. The more it hurt her, the more she clung to it, with a kind of frenetic exaltation—the exaltation of a flagellant. But there were moments—and she told herself that the reasons were strictly physical, due to the growing child within her womb; knew, too, subconsciously, that in thus explaining it to herself she lied to herself—when from the centre of her being pulses of life seemed to reach out to the past, out to her father . . . "my father no longer!" she would add, almost automatically; and she did not know that with each repetition, because the words became more and more automatic and therefore more and more meaningless, she weakened the effect.

She was on the point of telling her husband. Then she saw the scar on his face. She remembered her oath. Again her pride overcame her, her bitterness; and she was silent.

Only when Hassan spoke, so gently, of their child to come, she cuddled in his arms and kissed him.

"Hassan," she said, "let us promise to each other one thing."

"Anything, dear."

"When our little son comes . . ."

"Perhaps it will be a little daughter."

"No, no, no. A son! I know it. I feel it. Besides—" she laughed—"did I not follow el-Fosiha's advice to the letter——? Did I not avoid buttermilk

and pluck three hairs from your beard, paining you considerably?"

She was serious once more.

"When our son comes," she went on, "we must never let our pride take issue with our love, nor our love with our pride."

He knew what she meant. He, too, had heard the news. Abubekr Sabri had told him. He understood the struggle in Gouthia's soul.

"There is no danger," he smiled. "I am not a proud man."

"But I am a proud woman. And so—I promise!"

"So do I, heart of my heart!"

* * * *

She was silent again.

Incessantly, beyond her control, her thoughts ran to her father. Never before, since she had left him, had she been conscious of so imperious a desire to see him, to hear his voice, to stand by his side now that he was a Shareef no longer in pride and prejudice, but a humble dervish.

At one moment the feeling nearly obliterated the memory of her oath. But that moment passed.

She sighed. Hassan held her close.

"Do you love me?" she asked.

He kissed her.

"You have blinded my soul with a glance of your eyes," he said. "The fringe of your eyelids took me into captivity without ransom. Neither time nor distance can set me free from the shackles of my love."

"Shackles?" she smiled.

"Shackles of flowers, dear. Shackles of perfume . . ."

So they talked of their love, their life, their future, and the future of their unborn child, when the door opened and el-Fosiha entered and salaamed, on her back a bundle of clothes which she tossed into a corner.

"I have no longer a home," she announced.

She groped in her burnoose, drew out a match and a sadly crumpled cigarette, lit it, and remarked to nobody in particular that even to the noblest of women fate was fate, and that all came from Allah, the good as well as the evil.

"Thus," she continued, "let me not cavil at the evil, at misfortune. It would be blasphemy unspeakable. Only my stomach—" she slapped it—"it feels like a shriveled fig. I have not even since yesterday. . . ."

"Oh—" Hassan ran into the kitchen; returned at once with bread and dates and milk and cold mutton. "Here!" he said hospitably. *"Gum, hyaqoom, Ullah wah en-Neby, eflah*—rise, take your meat, and the Lord give you life and His Prophet!"

He bowed ceremoniously, as to an honored guest.

"The Lord multiply your virtuous bounty!" came the old negress' thanks.

She ate ravenously. She wiped her mouth with a generous edge of her burnoose. Finally she stood up.

"I shall go away now," she announced, settling down comfortably on her haunches. "Young lovers are selfish. They want no aged people about the house."

"No, no," smiled Gouthia. "Our house is yours."

"Indeed," agreed her husband. "Our house and all it contains."

El-Fosiha pointed at him with her thumb.

"He is a good beard," she commented. "If your father knew how good he is, Gouthia . . ."

"Sh—sh!" interrupted Hassan. "You must not mention his name."

El-Fosiha shrugged her shoulders.

"Hm—" she grumbled oracularly—"these are your wife's words, not your own, O pilgrim. Rather ride on a beetle than walk even on Persian carpets—say the Shareefs. *Hayah, hayah!*—all our goods are of silver and gold, even our copper kettles—say the proud!"

She rose; yawned.

"I am going to bed," she went on.

"What room, Gouthia?" asked Hassan. "The little one back of the kitchen?"

"For you—not for me," said el-Fosiha calmly.

"Eh——?"

"I shall sleep in your wife's room."

"You—what . . .?"

"We women need no man around in our hours of trial. Men at such moments are useless as barren spinsters, fit only to break the kitchen pots. I know. Am I not a mother—seven—eight times—and a grandmother—" her imagination soared—"one hundred and seventeen times? Hereafter it is I shall tell you what your wife needs, and when she needs it."

"Including," Hassan laughed, "when I may be permitted to kiss her?"

"Yes," came her dry reply. "It is never proper for a man to kiss a pregnant woman. Now I am tired. Good night!"

* * * *

Nor was her boast an empty one. She was imperious—and efficient. Even the French doctor, whom

Hassan had called in in spite of her vociferous and abusive objections, admitted it. During the weeks that followed she hardly ever left her mistress' side, day or night, and was always within call. It was she who ruled the house and its inmates; she who marketed, cutting down the prices in half by sheer force of lungs and patience; she who cooked—cooked so well that at times Gouthia felt a pang of jealousy and owned up to it with a laugh.

"Wait!" she said. "My Hassan will take you as second wife, el-Fosiha."

"He could do worse. I know all about passion."

"And more about cooking."

"*Wah!* If an onion causes his loud rejoicing, what will he say to sugar? Tonight we shall have pigeons, stuffed with dates and pistache nuts and well basted."

"I, too?"

"Yes."

"And—" smiled Gouthia—"buttermilk?"

"Not a drop, O small face of misfortune!"

* * * *

And so spring sank to its close. An intense heat—the harbinger of sudden African summer—veiled the desert with a moist, violet haze.

El-Korma seemed washed over as with the lazy gold of the tropics. The fields were yellow with the glint of kerning corn. The gardens were an entangled, exuberant mingling of leaves and spiky creepers and waxen, odorous flowers, a great sea of vegetation, a rolling wave of green life—new life—and life, too, stirred in the little room where Gouthia lay on her couch. Life grew in her consciousness, deepening and softening the glory of her eyes. It pulsed through her with the earth's vibrant currents.

"A son—it will be a son—" she said to Hassan who was bending over her couch, touching her hot forehead with cool, caressing fingers.

"Surely, best beloved."

"It must be a son, Hassan!"

"Yes, yes . . ."

"Go away," el-Fosiha interrupted him. "Your wife needs sleep."

"But—" objected Gouthia—"I want to talk to him."

"I know what is good for you!" came the old negress' dragooning accents.

She turned to Hassan:

"Go away, O pilgrim."

* * * *

Gouthia smiled. She winked at Hassan who winked back and left.

She closed her eyes, day-dreaming.

There were moments, during the days that followed, when she suffered; moments when the sufferings, strangely, incongruously, seemed sweet; moments when an intense realization of loveliness arrested her conscious thoughts, staggering her with a flash of radiant and gleaming whiteness; moments when the miracle of creation appeared to her as something refulgent, stupendous, even terrifying; moments when she did not feel her body at all, but seemed to sink down into vast silences where no sound could reach to her without having first passed through enormous spans of time and distance that were as if cushioned in soft air.

And all the time she felt, she knew, that this new life growing within her own was more than a mere individual existence. It seemed to connect her, by

a network of infinitely delicate filaments, with all the riotous, impatient life of the earth outside that drifted through the open window of her bedroom with the chittering of song birds, the barking of dogs, the cries of street and bazaar, and the scent of tulips and late roses, of lime and walnut and cinnamon trees.

Propped up on a pillow she would half see, half dream it: a gentle pattering of rain upon the palm fronds—fingers of slim, violet haze stabbing out of the sun's lemon welter—garden pinks shaking their small, starry faces in the breeze—the moon rising in a blaze of silver and green—the golden hush of the stars—the young sun shooting up in a sea of fire—thronging, passing moments of life, revelation, creation—whispering fragments of a huge and eternal message. . . .

Message of the First Creator. Allah.

"Say: He who first made thee to be shall quicken thee;

For all creating He knoweth well;

Who made for you fire from a green tree,

And behold, ye kindle with it;

And is not He who created the Heavens and the Earth

Able to create their like;

Who created man and woman

Able to create their like?

Yea! For He is the wise Creator!

His command, when He willeth a thing,

Is only to say 'Be!', and it is!"

She prayed often; prayed fervently.

And there came the day when, in some amazing fashion, she felt within herself the thoughts and

passions and dreams of all the women of all the world; the mute, inexpressible yearnings of motherhood; the desires and sufferings of millions; the reaching up, with a soft, nesting rush, into the arms of God, of nature.

She saw, very dimly, the French doctor's bearded, bespectacled face, the old negress peering anxiously, snapping her fingers rapidly to ward off the winds of misfortune, and Hassan looking down at her with mute, frightened eyes.

She saw, more dimly still, as if seen through a veil of poignant regret, a memory of her father's face; and with it there rose in the active cells of her brain the longing that he were here, near her—and there would be no question of forgiveness or asking forgiveness—and her oath to the Prophet—why—the Prophet would forgive . . . if he were only here . . . and she wondered if she spoke the words aloud.

* * * *

These pictures passed.

Came an eternity of waiting, when an immense, black shutter dropped across her mind noiselessly, with the speed of summer lightning, and she seemed to stand beyond the threshold of her own existence, watching it uncomprehendingly; another eternity when she had recrossed the threshold and felt within her a strange mingling of delight and pain.

The pain she recognized. It was a wrenching; a savage pushing; a dislocating.

But this delight, this great, radiant happiness, was something which she had never experienced before. Yet she knew what it was. It was the consciousness of new life breaking through the shell of the old, the

shell of her woman's flesh, with a great wonder, a great completeness of longing utterly fulfilled; and peace came, still as the depths of the desert; and then the peace was shivered by a cry, a small cry, a selfish, imperious cry—the cry of a little baby.

She heard Hassan's voice:

"A son—a son . . ."

She did not open her eyes immediately.

She felt once more—abandoned herself to it with a soft, luxurious surrender—the great wonder, the great completeness of longing utterly fulfilled. She did not know how long it was before she became conscious of something tiny and warm nestling in her arms; heard again the small, selfish cry; felt the small, selfish clutch of baby fingers.

* * * *

She opened her eyes.

El-Fosiha was at the window, raising the blinds a little. At the foot of the bed stood Hassan, and near him she saw her father, aged, bent, rather grey-faced, in the costume of a Molawee dervish.

"Father—" she said weakly—"father . . ."

He dropped on his knees by her side.

"Little soul," he said, "your husband has already forgiven me. And as for you—behold—I am on my knees——"

She smiled. She took his hand; kissed it.

"On your knees only, father dear," she said, "because I am still too weak to rise and put my arms about you and touch your lips with mine. . . ."

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!" came suddenly the old negress' shrill cry of triumph.

She ran to the door.

"I must tell the news to all el-Korma," she exclaimed, "that a son has come to this blessed house—may he be the first of many!"

She turned on the threshold.

"What shall his name be?" she asked.

"My father's name was Fahim," said Hassan. "Fahim is a good name."

"A good name indeed," agreed Mustaffa Madani. "A decent, respectable name. And yet . . ."

"Yes, father?" asked Gouthia.

"I would suggest Mohammed."

"Why?" demanded Hassan.

"Why?" echoed Mustaffa Madani. He looked surprised. "Was not the Prophet—on Him the salute!—the founder of our clan, of the Shareefian families? And—" with utter seriousness, staring at Hassan rather reproachfully—"is not your little son, too, of Shareefian blood? Is he not my grandson? Is he not of the lineage?"

"You are right," said Gouthia. She was as serious as her father. Her eyes, too, as she looked at her husband, held a faint expression of reproach. "We shall name him Mohammed."

"Mohammed!" echoed el-Fosiha.

A moment later, her call drifted in from the street:

"Yoo-yoo-yoo! Cry yoo-yoo-yoo, O Moslems! A little Moslem has been born today—a little Shareef—a descendant of the True Prophet—on Him the salute!"

* * * *

Hassan did not speak.

He looked at Mustaffa Madani. He looked at his wife. He looked at his little son.

Shareefs all three—he thought—of the lineage all three.

* * * *

He remembered Gouthia's words:

"When our son comes we must never let our pride take issue with our love, nor our love with our pride."

She had promised.

And yet—they were of the lineage, these three. Hard. Proud, Wire-drawn. Inflexible. And his little child, his son. Blood of his blood, and bone of his bone. Yes. But blood, too, of Gouthia's blood, and bone, too, of her bone.

He loved her. She loved him.

True. True.

But there was the future. There was Fate. Fate like a blind camel, coming out of the dark, with no warning, no jingling of bells. And love might change; might turn into indifference, dislike. And on that day she would still be a Shareef, while he . . .

* * * *

He looked again at his father-in-law, his wife, his son. A trinity. A unity.

And he, himself——?

Outside. Beyond the threshold. Beyond the pale.

And he shuddered a little as, from the distance, came el-Fosiha's voice, spreading the news:

"Yoo-yoo-yoo! Cry yoo-yoo-yoo, O Moslems! A little Moslem has been born today—a little Shareef—a descendant of the True Prophet—on Him the Salute!"

* * * *

THE MONSTER

By Stephen Morehouse Avery

If you look at it one way, this bit of human comedy was acted out on a very small stage, a mere twelve-by-fourteen sea raft, strung about and buoyed by empty casks. Or else you can take for scene the whole flat of the South Pacific; long, sluggish swells; a white sun burning into the blue-parasol spread of the sky. There were eight in the cast—on that raft. It was three days ago.

Or, rather, it was nine days ago that the aged and overburdened collier, the Water Lily, had wallowed out of Sydney harbor and twelve hundred miles on her way to Manila Bay. The typhoon played with her two days. So it was three days ago, after all—three days since the battered old coal scuttle, with a serious list to starboard, decks awash, funnel and bridge torn out, had stuck her nose under a mountain of sea and slid on down to the bottom.

Pity, too, for the storm was over then. Pity that she gave so little warning. Only the little group which was watching the ship's carpenter, Smoky Joe Bridell, rig that raft got off. There was Job Nichols, a couple of husky yellow-headed Swedish stokers who were on relief, the Chinese cook, who had come up to strap on a big tin box of provisions, and the first officer's wife and her kid.

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There was one other. In the mad moment after the plunge they found a huge deck hand named Griff Rierson, a fierce and yet child-minded creature, clutching at a bit of rope which trailed from the raft, while he kept afloat on some sort of flimsy crate.

Smoky Joe and Nichols kicked him away again and again. There wasn't room for that hulk or food enough. But he made them understand finally that his crate was full of booze. "I'll give yer a drink," he shouted every time he got his head up. So they yanked him aboard, blood trickling from where Nichols' boot had split his lip and his mop of red hair soaked over his eyes.

He lay flat on his back on the raft and laughed inanely. "Now I'll give yer a drink." He had clung to the crate.

But they had already taken a drink. Later, after that first desperate day, clinging, half-submerged, fighting for breath and warmth while the sea went mad, they took drinks steadily, the stokers, too, until they were shapeless lumps which stirred only to curse and quarrel and drink again.

The Chinese cook didn't drink though, not even after the immediate peril was over and the sun was warm. He sat on the edge of the raft, like a ragged Buddha, and stared through the cracks of his eyes across the heaving plane of the sea—green water until farther it was blue and then gray and then faintly purple under the shadow of the horizon. He seemed unaware of the present, barely alive.

Yet he was alive and quite aware, could have told exactly how many biscuit Smoky Joe had taken out of that box.

Smoky must have known that Tai Huan was aware, and also he must have noted, blinking in a lucid moment out of reddened eyes, the queer way Tai's hands were folded in the waistline bunches of his shirt. For he said, "Hey, there, China boy, lend us yer knife. Gotta cut a hole in this blasted belt."

The cook shifted his gaze. "No gottee knife, M'ser Smokee. No catch 'em knife before get away. Too bad."

"Ye're a heathen liar." Smoky Joe glared a moment until, as the raft dipped, his body lurched sideways. He sprawled asleep. Tai Huan's little eyes shot quick glances. He crawled to the tin box, raised the lid, peered in. For a long time he was thus, while his thin lips formed unuttered words and he counted laboriously on his fingers. "Two day," he murmured. "Mebbe t'ree day. . . ." A grunt made him start and face around into the blank stare of Griff Rierson. At first he was undecided. Then he said: "Mebbe last t'ree day, M'ser Griff."

The big fellow's jaw drooped, and his broad, freckle-spotted face drew up as though he were going to cry. "Ye're eatin' it all, ye Chink," he whined, "jes' cause we're drinkin'." And then, apparently unconscious of his own suddenly changed expression, tiny blue eyes under his red bush of hair puckering into fierce, darting points, the visage of a beast, he pleaded: "Please don't be eatin' it all, Chinky."

Tai Huan felt the threat. A shiver passed through his narrow shoulders, and in one movement he was back in his place on the edge of the raft.

In the center, just beyond the tin box, sat Mrs. Digges, knitting mechanically, whispering to herself, pausing occasionally to weep a little without

lowering or covering her face. It was pure chance that the first officer's frail little wife had gone over with the raft at all, she and her precious knitting and her precious round-eyed, four-year-old brat. There had been some talk that the lanky Digges had abused his wife pretty much, and her shrinking figure and pale, downcast face gave truth to the story. Or else she was the type of bloodless little blonde that fades at thirty anyway.

She was brave enough though, and accepted Smoky Joe's distribution of biscuits for herself and her boy without either thanks or pleas for more; just went on working her old-fashioned steel knitting needles in a maze of gray yarn. The button on the end of the one in her right hand kept describing funny little circles and arcs eternally, and already she had made a full-length jumper for the tad and a sweater.

The child sat at her knee, holding the yarn, sleeping, waking to cry petulantly and to ask a hundred questions. Once he let a loop of yarn trail into the water, and his mother rapped him lightly across the knuckles for it with her needle. His wail should have brought every ship in the South Pacific to their rescue, and when she saw that the sharp point had actually touched him enough to bring a speck of blood, she was angrier still. "Shut up that yellin'," she shrilled, "or I'll give you some'at to holler about."

The youngster looked at her as though he had never seen her before.

Smoky Joe had been watching, bleary-eyed. "Don't be hard on th' little feller, missus. We don't mind his yappin'."

"He's got to behave then," she replied. "His father spoiled him, an' that's the truth."

There was more drinking that evening and far into the moonless, overcast night. The raft coasted endlessly into the dark valleys between waves and was borne up again as by a force unseen to crests where a froth of white gleamed in the black. When morning came, Job Nichols had vanished.

It was a hard price to pay for the common-place pleasure of getting drunk. He had rolled off, of course. Nobody cared much.

It was interminable, their fourth day. The sky was a dirty, stained gray, and the water was gray, and the swells too sluggish to break out a flag of foam. The five hopeless men and the hopeless woman, the child, on that raft were a pin point in space, lost. They felt it, and there would have been more drinking than ever but for Rierson. He had conceived the idea of trading his liquor for the other men's share of biscuits and he was sitting guard over the safely moored crate like some giant ogre before the entrance of his cave. That night also cost a man. One of the stokers was missing—was simply not there, and the first yellow of daylight had scarcely thinned the murk when the fellow's companion bounded to his feet, chattering unintelligibly and gesticulating in front of Rierson's face.

The deck hand was too thick-headed to understand, but he shot back a venomous glitter, murderous-looking enough to have throttled and drowned any of them. His unwavering squint through the locks of dull red hair, which fell over his inch of brow, infuriated the stoker. Little blue beads—that's what his eyes were, narrowing upon the yelling man in front of him. "I didn't," he said finally. "I ain't moved from this here spot all night."

The stoker whirled around to Smoky Joe and Tai Huan. "He's a liar!" he shouted, still flinging out an arm at Griff. "He's put that young Chris in de water. He's drown us one by one."

Smoky Joe took his gaze from a scrutiny of the Chinese cook's impassive features. "You'd better shut up, my friend," he said to the stoker. "Griff'll kill you."

The deck hand arose until they might have thought his bulk would never stop looming upward. Smoky Joe had given him an idea, and the short, back-handed blow he struck across the stoker's mouth dropped him limp to the raft. The man lay there, still, his yellow head half in the water.

"There y'are now," whimpered Griff, slumping back to his corner. "I give yer a belt for sayin' it."

A sudden wail from the first officer's brat brought their attention to Mrs. Digges. She had fainted—when Griff hit the stoker probably. Tai Huan and Smoky bent over her and put water on her brow. Poor bit! She was too delicate for all this. The expression of terror was still upon her white face and her hands clutched convulsively into her bundle of gray yarn.

"She'd'a been crazy but for her knittin'," said Smoky. "Get the water bottle for her."

The cook didn't move. "Not many water left, M'ser Smokee. One—two bottle——"

"Get it!" commanded Smoky. His eyes became intent upon those oriental features. "I don't think she could stand the shock if any more of us should —fall overboard. Fall overboard—you hear. Tai Huan? Up to Tientsin one time a China boy bared a knife on me. I pushed it down his yella throat."

Tai Huan delayed over the tin box. His long fingers gripped the edge of it. Finally one of his fingers lifted, pointed out straight, then a second, a third. In the end he had lifted four fingers, one after the other, as though counting.

Smoky Joe still bent over the woman. He was mumbling. "Funny she's so cross with Digge's kid."

She sat up suddenly and looked about her. "Where's Freddie?" She jerked him by the arm. "Hush that noise now! Ain't there enough without that? Here, gimme that needle. You'll be stickin' yourself, an' then you will holler."

When night came it was a black night, black enough to blank their sight. They could not see the water, the raft, each other, their own hands, if held at a distance. In a way they were glad. It was a night of silence too. Once—it must have been long past midnight—the woman's voice broke out, shrill but husky with terror, "He's coming. Oh, quick! He's coming!"

Smoky Joe's answer was as immediate as though he'd been waiting for her cry. "He'd better not. If he comes this side of the raft I'll cut his yellow throat with his own knife."

For a time he and lanky Digges' wife talked in low voices.

"No," she said, "it was the big one; I saw him. I think I saw him."

"It's all right, missus. Go back to your corner."

That was all. An hour later the stoker had a fit of coughing, a gulping, shaking cough; and when the light came, there wasn't a trace of him. They knew now, something terrible.

Smoky Joe would have strangled Tai Huan then

and there. The cook moved to the far edge of the raft, eyes white and his mouth drooping half open. But something in the ferocity of Smoky's advance touched a spring in the mind of that big red creature in the corner, watching.

"You did it!" he shouted, pointing. "You killed him yourself. I seen you kill 'im. You let Chinky alone now."

Smoky stopped.

Another bank of mist enveloped them for a brief moment. The sun was burning through that ceiling of gray, pulling up a fog which brushed the tops of the lazy swells, thickening. There were moments of complete invisibility, increasing in frequency. They waited longer and longer for the light to break through the opaque white, silent, anxious minutes, fifteen minutes. Then the fog settled, closed about them.

They could see nothing, hear nothing but their own quick breath and the stir of water, feel nothing but the rise and fall of the raft, alarmed and tense at any sudden dip. Smoky Joe's voice sounded far away. "I think we'd better call off. Start now and answer every ten minutes. Mrs. Digges?"

"Yes, all right." Her thin voice was just audible.

"You keep hold the lad, missus. Griff?"

"Yah! Here—but you keep away, you!"

There was a pause and then Smoky's voice again: "Tai Huan?"

"Yes-s-s—can come sit by you, M'ser Smokee? He can reach——"

"Stay where you are. If you stir a foot——"

They waited for Smoky's next call. It seemed a long time. There were five, counting the little one,

and six counting the specter which in fancy sat at their elbows. They started at every imagined noise, every bump of the loose casks against the edge of the raft, every swirl of water. They shrank from each eddy of mist that drew outlines, like clouds in the sky, of some ghastly shape to fit the picture in their minds.

They waited for Smoky to call. It seemed an hour since the last. The woman had begun to sing a lullaby in a strained, dry voice:

"Bobby Shaftoe's gone to sea,
Silver buckles on his knee——

Hold up the yarn, Freddie."

She was all right then. She was knitting. Over in the corner sounded that crunching noise of Griff chewing a biscuit. Why didn't Smoky call?

The woman hushed her song abruptly. She was listening. Then she spoke out sharply: "Smoky Joe!" There was no answer. Her voice trailed away. "O God, what's it all for, anyway?"

There was a clamor then from Tai Huan and Griff shouting Smoky's name. There was no answer. They dared not move. They would go mad before their own turns came.

Griff was crying like a ten-year-old child, blubbering like a baby and then swearing horribly at all the "knifin', murderin' Chinkies in the world."

Tai Huan had become silent. There was one rift in the fog, one instant of visibility when they saw him flat on the raft with his fingers forced into the cracks between the boards, glaring in the direction of Griff, like a cornered beast. The big man yelped

with fright at the sight. There was no sign of Smoky Joe. Then the white blanket of fog dropped again. They were no longer quite sane, those three.

The fog hung on. Night came again. A three-quarter moon bathed the silent raft in dim white light. None of them seemed to have stirred. The bulk of shadow rocking to and fro at one corner was Rierson, still there. Across the raft, huddled in a little heap, the frail bit of woman bent over her child. Stretched in the corner facing the huge deck-hand was Tai Huan, a flat splotch of black still clutching the boards of the raft.

Suddenly the woman said in a dull, lifeless voice: "Look! He's gone." Then she looked away, out into the moon-shot mists.

Griff stared, and then sat there blinking vacantly at the spot where the Chinese cook had been. A pale dawn flushed the east, and daylight rushed over the peaceful sea. Gradually it turned into blue sky, blue and golden under a great, rolling, glorious sun.

Some time after noon the woman spoke to Rierson. She had been trying to knit, but her trembling fingers could not guide the shining needles and she had put her work aside. "Rierson," she said, "there's only two of us now. The boy don't count—eats hardly a bite. You ain't gonna do no more, are you, Rierson?"

When the grin left Griff's face and alarm shone out of his little beady eyes, she went on, terrified apparently: "I ain't blamin' yer, Griff. I'll never tell on yer. There wern't enough fer us all. But me and the kid hardly takes a thing. Ye'll not do it, Griff. It'll be too lonely fer you."

After moments of blankness, Griff said: "So you

think I done it, missus? Funny they should all think I done it when I ain't never hurt nobody."

"I ain't blamin' ye, Griff——"

"You know who done it, missus?" Griff leaned forward and his face began to work, as though he were in torture. "I ain't told nobody." His voice dropped to a whisper. "There's somethin' under this here raft, missus. There's somethin' hangin' on the bottom. I looked under an' seen it, and it reached one of its twistin', curlin' black arms at me an' I dodged back."

The little woman shrank back, her clenched hand pressed to her mouth. "It's one of them—them things?"

"Yes—it had more'n twenty arms, and eyes in all of 'em, and two big eyes in his head which is big as a barrel. It's like I seen pictures of once, all black and slickery. The Chinky seen it, too, and that's why he hung on so." Griff's excitement mastered him. His lips formed words that he could not utter. His huge, gesturing arms made patterns in the air. "But it weren't no good for the Chinky to hang on, 'cause at night one of them arms come writhin' over and gets him by the neck so he can't holler and drags him over inch by inch so there ain't no splash."

"Oh!" Her hands braced against the boards to hold her up, but her head fell forward as though there was no bone in her neck.

"So now yer know—who done it," whispered Griff. His eyes were the eyes of a maniac, blazing.

Presently the woman looked up. "Come here, Freddie." She dragged at the little boy's wrist. Then to Griff. "We'd better get in the middle of the raft."

When evening first began to shade down the light, Griff lifted his head. "Mebbe yer better hook yer hand into my belt, missus. Then if it's you, I can help hold yer, and if it's me, yer can help hang on ter me, see?"

Later, just before dark Griff began to chuckle. "Funny how they all thought it was me, missus. Weren't it?"

Long hours, black hours, moon-gilded hours, dim, gray—white pale of day, the slow flush of a lazy morning in the South Pacific.

Gradually the figures on the drifting raft stood out clear. A huge inert form lay along one edge, so close that the great shaggy head pushed into the water between two of the casks. Over it stood the little woman, her skirt flapping in the stir of the breeze. She peered down into the water while she waited to catch her breath at a piece of thick rope which trailed and turned under the raft whenever it drifted back upon its aimless course. "Them black arms of his'n," she murmured; "nothin' but rope."

Behind her the little boy had poked his whole head and shoulders into the tin box. He came out with a biscuit in each hand. "Muvver! Muvver! Kin I have two?"

She didn't reply, but bent down and pushed at the bulk at her feet. She knew how to do it by half turns, slowly and silently. The thing would have slipped away from her then into the water. But she stopped and took something from it before she let it go.

For a moment she stood there gazing far out to sea, shading her eyes with the palm of her hand. Finally she turned around. "Freddie darlin', hand yer mother her knittin'—right there."

"Kin I have two?" Freddie reached up the bundle of gray yarn. She took it from him and thrust the long steel needle into it, red as it was, to the very button-hilt.